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ABSTRACT

In a multi-stressed environment children and families are affected by one or more sources of significant stress--for example, homelessness, substance abuse, or lack of basic necessities. Living with high levels of stress can take a toll on young children's development. This skill-based staff development program was developed to help classroom teams address the needs of children and families from multi-stressed environments. The program has two purposes: (1) to suggest practical strategies for working with children who live in multistressed environments; and (2) to provide ongoing support for classroom teams. Following an introduction for the trainer, the guide is divided into two parts: "Trainer's Notes" and "Participants' Materials." The "Trainer's Notes" are designed to assist trainers in understanding the purposes of each training session. Both parts have the following eight chapters: (1) "Responding to Stress"; (2) "Head Start's Response"; (3) "Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments"; (4) "The Learning Environment"; (5) "The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions"; (6) "Helping Children Cope with Stress"; (7) "Supporting Parents"; and (8) "An Approach to Problem Solving." An agenda, a list of discussion topics and activities are provided in each session. Contains 45 references. (MOK)

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ED 399 008

Responding to Children Under STRESS

A skill-based training guide for classroom teams

PS 024290

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Responding to Children Under Stress

A Skill-Based Training Guide for Classroom Teams

Prepared for
The Head Start Bureau by
DGK & Co.

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Introduction for Trainers

In a multistressed environment children and families are affected by one or more sources of significant stress, for example, homelessness, substance abuse, or lack of basic necessities. The stresses are not caused by single events such as divorce or death of a parent. Rather, they are routine, unrelenting, and woven into daily life and are a result of societal conditions and pressures that are beyond the control of individuals.

Living with high levels of stress can take a toll on young children's development in both direct and indirect ways (Molnar, 1991). For example, children may not receive immunizations or medical care, they may not have safe places to play, or they may not have enough food at mealtimes. Parents' energies often are focused on meeting the family's most basic needs: food, clothing, shelter, and safety. There may be little time to focus on meeting the less obvious social and emotional needs of young children; therefore, children may not receive the emotional support they need to grow and develop.

Many Head Start staff have asked for assistance in addressing the needs of children and families from multistressed environments. This skill-based training program was developed in response to these requests.

The Purpose of this Skill-Based Training Program

This skill-based training program has a dual purpose. First, it suggests **practical strategies** for working with children who live in multistressed environments. If the strategies sound useful and feasible, classroom teams can try them in their work with children.

Second, participating in this staff development program can provide **ongoing support** for classroom teams. The support groups introduced in Session 8 can continue indefinitely, with the Education Coordinator and/or Mental Health Specialist serving as facilitators. Depending on staff responsibilities, programs may want to actively involve other coordinators. Ongoing support for staff has been built into this program for several reasons:

- Working with children who are highly stressed can be emotionally demanding. Classroom teams need a clear **understanding of their role** and how the other components support their efforts. This understanding can help them avoid doing too much and becoming frustrated and stressed. Team work is an essential part of the job—within the classroom, the Education Component, and the Head Start program.

- Some staff may themselves **live with multiple sources of stress** (for example, living in a community where violence is prevalent). They may benefit from talking about the stress they experience in their own lives, as well as the stress they experience in trying to meet children's needs. This is covered in depth in Session 1, and continues in the other sessions.

- Staff may have **conflicting feelings** about families—at times supportive, at other times angry and judgmental. These feelings are normal. While it is important for staff to express their feelings, they need to feel empathy and respect for families in order to support their children. Trainers can model respect and empathy for families as an integral part of all sessions.

Content of the Training Sessions

To fully benefit from this training, classroom teams need knowledge and skills in three specific areas. First, they should **have basic knowledge of child growth and development**. Second, they should **understand and be implementing developmentally appropriate practice**. Lastly, as many of the follow-up activities involve observing children, it is also important for classroom teams to know how to **conduct and record observations**. In addition, classroom teams should have a **working knowledge of the multicultural principles for Head Start Programs**. If classroom teams need further assistance in these areas, we suggest that such training be provided before beginning this program.

This training reinforces the following principles that guide all Head Start programs:

- Parents want the best for their children. They are the **prime educators** of their children. Strong partnerships between classroom teams and parents are based on respect and trust. Both parents and classroom teams make unique contributions that help children develop "social competence."

- Head Start is a multidisciplinary program, designed to be implemented by a **team of staff**. Each component supports the work of the others. Individual staff members do not work in isolation. Instead, they work as a team to help children and families receive the full benefits of Head Start.

Below are summaries of each two-hour session:

1. **Responding to Stress** addresses the meaning of stress, discusses healthy and unhealthy ways to manage stress, and describes the conditions that may exist in multistressed environments. Participants complete an activity related to accepting families.

2. **Head Start's Response** reviews the roles and responsibilities of each Head Start component. Classroom teams define the constructive roles they play in working with children and families, both within the classroom and in conjunction with other components.

3. **Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments** reviews the signs that a child may be experiencing high levels of stress. Next comes an overview of how children develop self-esteem and what classroom teams can do to support children's development of self-esteem and other skills. After a brief review of observation and recording, an activity focuses on getting to know individual children.

4. **The Learning Environment** describes some elements of a supportive environment that are important for all children, but are particularly important for children who live in multistressed environments. Classroom teams focus on an individual child and suggest ways to adapt the environment to meet the child's needs.

5. **The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions** begins with a discussion of how participants respond to disruptions in their daily lives and how children typically respond to changes at home or Head Start. The importance of predictable, consistent schedules, routines, and transitions is emphasized. Classroom teams review situations in which children have difficulty handling transitions and discuss ways to help the children cope.

6. **Helping Children Cope with Stress** describes how classroom teams can help children learn acceptable ways to cope with stress. Participants discuss the reasons for children's behavior and positive guidance techniques that promote self-dicipline. Strategies for handling challenging behaviors are presented and teams analyze possible reasons for a child's behavior.

7. **Supporting Parents** reviews the role of parents in Head Start and offers examples of how staff can support parents. The importance of accepting parents without passing judgment is emphasized. Classroom teams read and discuss "stories" based on the experiences of a Head Start teacher.

8. **An Approach to Problem Solving** provides a format for analyzing and developing strategies for addressing specific problems. This session also is the planning meeting for defining the goals and format for an ongoing support group.

Definitions of Terms Used in the Training Guide

The term **classroom team** is used to describe master teachers, teachers, assistants, aides, classroom volunteers, and other adults who work directly with children. Occasionally the term **teacher** is used to designate any of the above classroom team members.

The term **Education Coordinator** refers to the staff member who is responsible for overseeing the Education Services Component. The term **Mental Health Specialist** refers to the full or part-time employee or consultant who is responsible for overseeing the mental health section of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. Ideally, this person will have had experience working with high-risk children and families.

The term **trainer** refers to the individuals who are leading the sessions.

Format of the Training Guide

Responding to Children Under Stress: A Skill-Based Training Guide includes three sections—this *Introduction for Trainers, Trainers' Notes,* and *Participants' Materials.* The *Trainers' Notes* include for each session an **Overview for Trainers** which presents the session objectives, materials and equipment needed to lead the session, and the **agenda.** The agenda describes the topics and activities and provides guidance on how to lead the sessions. Content for each session is included in the readings, as described below.

The *Participants' Materials* include for each session a **Summary for Classroom Teams** which present the session objectives, materials needed by participants, and the agenda. The agenda describes the topics and activities and what participants will be doing in the sessions. Also included in this section are readings, handouts, and follow-up activities. The **Reading** provides the content for the session. It is used by trainers during the session and by participants as a professional resource. The **Handouts** describe learning activities conducted during the session. The **Follow-Up Activities** are used by classroom teams between sessions to apply and further develop skills and knowledge.

Implementing the Training Program

Ideally, the program's Education Coordinator and Mental Health Specialist will work together to lead the sessions, with other coordinators involved as appropriate. Your program might want to utilize mental health providers in your community as trainers and resources. Some suggested training approaches and issues to consider follow.

Training Approaches	Issues to Consider
Education Coordinator & Mental Health Specialist (counselor, therapist, early intervention) serve as co-facilitators of sessions.	This approach takes advantage of each trainer's expertise and skills. The Education Coordinator understands the program and classroom practices. The Mental Health Specialist understands the effects of high levels of stress on children and families. Heor she can also support staff if they become overwhelmed by the challenges of their jobs. The Mental Health Specialist may need an orientation to the program and classroom practices. If the Education Coordinator supervises classroom teams, she or he may need to emphasize that the training is being provided to support staff, not to judge or evaluate them.
Education Coordinator works with other coordinators and/or Head Start Director as co-facilitators of sessions.	This approach takes advantage of the Education Coordinator's knowledge and emphasizes Head Start's "team" approach. The coordinators and/or the director should acknowledge classroom team's problem solving skills, but encourage them to seek support from other components when needed.
Lead teacher facilitates sessions. Lead teachers could take turns being trainer.	This approach gives lead teachers responsibility and encourages classroom teams to build on their own strengths. Programs need to be sure that this extra responsibility does not place a burden on lead teachers. Programs may want to invite "guest" trainers from the community to provide new ideas and perspectives.

Each two-hour session builds on the information and activities presented in the previous one. We suggest scheduling them on a weekly basis. Depending on program needs, you may want to cover the material more quickly, or you may want to take more time with specific topics or activities.

Head Start programs have different needs. After reviewing the training guide, you may want to adapt the sessions to address needs identified by you and the classroom teams, or to reflect your own training style. For example, teams might want to focus on one or two children as they participate in the eight sessions, and as they complete the follow-up activities. This approach would give them in-depth knowledge of these children and their families, how they are affected by multistressed environments, and appropriate ways for Head Start to respond.

Making the Most of the Follow-Up Activities

The follow-up activities allow classroom teams to apply the skills and information gained through each session as they work with children in their classrooms. When appropriate, teams are asked to consult with other component staff as they complete the activities. The activities are discussed at the beginning of the next session before new topics are introduced. Trainers may want to expand the time devoted to discussing the follow-up activities as these exercises reinforce and build upon the content and activities addressed in the sessions.

Most of the follow-up activities ask classroom teams to focus on an individual child. It is likely that much valuable information will be collected about individual children that can be included in their individual files. In addition, it might be appropriate to use the activity to identify and address the needs of all the children in the classroom.

Establishing Ongoing Support Groups

Support groups bring together people who are experiencing a similar stress to exchange and process information. In the support groups formed at the end of Session 8, classroom teams can meet to discuss individual children and to brainstorm strategies for creating the kind of environments, routines, and interactions that will help children who are experiencing high levels of stress. Support groups can help staff:

- feel less isolated and part of a larger team;
- reduce their stress levels by discussing problems encountered in their work;
- learn and apply problem solving strategies; and
- identify available resources within Head Start and the community.

Over time, as the support group continues meeting, leaders are likely to emerge within the group. These individuals can assume greater leadership within the group and facilitate sessions if the Education Coordinator or Mental Health Specialist is not available.

Providing Additional Training

There are many reasons why a child or family might be experiencing high levels of stress. Depending on child, family, and staff needs, Head Start programs might want to address more topics than are included in this training. For example, your program may want to provide training on topics such as:

- Supporting children with special needs;
- The effects of community violence on children;
- Preventing and responding to substance abuse;
- Recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect;
- Developmentally appropriate practice;
- The importance of play in an early childhood program;
- Communicating with parents;
- Child development from birth to age five; or
- Working with homeless children and families.

There are many excellent resources on the above topics. For more information, you can review the list of resources included at the end of this introduction and/or contact your Head Start technical assistance providers.

Adapting these Materials for Other Components

Although these materials were designed to support classroom teams in their work with children who are highly stressed, Head Start programs may want to adapt them to provide training for other components. In addition, much of the content is useful for home visitors and other staff in home-based programs. These staff development materials can supplement materials developed specifically for the home-based option.

Additional Resources

Materials Developed by the Head Start Bureau

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Kaplan-Sanoff, M. and E. F. Kletter, "The Developmental Needs of Abused Children: Classroom Strategies," *Beginnings*, Fall 1985.

Klein, Tovah, Calley Bittel, and Janice Molnar, "No Place to Call Home: Supporting the Needs of Homeless Children in the Early Childhood Classroom," *Young Children,* September 1993.

McCormick, Linda and Rita Holden, "Homeless Children: A Special Challenge," *Young Children,* September 1992.

Neiman, Laura, "A Critical Review of Resiliency Literature and its Relevance to Homeless Children," *Children's Environment Quarterly,* Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1988.

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Trainers' Notes

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Session 1
Responding to Stress

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Recognize the sources of stress that can affect adults.
- Understand physiological, physical, and psychological responses to stress.
- Handle stress in healthy rather than unhealthy ways.
- Describe how families are affected by multistressed environments.
- Plan ways to work as a team to assist children and families.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- Reading
  1: Responding to Stress
- Handouts
  1-1: Responding to Children Under Stress—Session Overviews
  1-2: Accepting Families
- Follow-Up Activities
  1-1: Daily Log
  1-2: Life in a Multistressed Environment

Agenda

I. Presentation of the Content and Format of the Sessions (10 minutes)

Use the *Introduction for Trainers* to present the content and format of the staff development program.

- The purpose of the staff development program is to suggest practical strategies for working with children and families who are living with high levels of stress and to provide ongoing support for classroom teams.

- Participant materials for each session include a reading, handout(s), and follow-up activities. The **reading** summarizes the content of the session, the **handout(s)** are used for learning activities during the session, and the **follow-up activities** are used by classroom teams to apply the information and skills gained through the session as they work with individual children and families.

- The term **classroom team** refers to master teachers, teachers, assistants, aides, classroom volunteers, and other adults who work directly with children. Occasionally, the term **teacher** is used to designate any of the above team members.

- Classroom teams will work together during the sessions and to complete follow-up activities.

Distribute *Handout 1-1: Responding to Children Under Stress: Session Overviews* and review the content and format of each session.

- The first seven sessions can help participants develop skills and knowledge.

- Session 8 provides guidance on establishing an ongoing support group for classroom teams (teachers, assistants, volunteers).

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Your Own Experiences With Stress (1 hour)

In this session participants will discuss stress: the kinds they experience, how they cope, what they do to minimize sources of stress, and what happens when it gets out of control. It is important for staff to recognize their own responses to stress and to learn how to handle it effectively because their jobs (working with children and families) can be very stressful. No matter how much they like their jobs, how well they do them, or how rewarding they find the work, most of the "helping professions" (e.g., teaching, child care, social work, nursing) can be very demanding.

Next lead a discussion on "What is stress?" You can use the definition in the reading to get the group started.

What are some sources of stress in your life outside of work?

As you lead a discussion on sources of stress in participants' personal lives, remind them that what is stressful for one person may not be for another. In addition, emphasize that not all stress is negative. Many joyous occasions such as the birth of a child, a wedding, or a graduation also are stressful. Feelings of stress can even give people the extra energy they need to tackle a difficult job, handle a dangerous situation, or respond in an emergency.

Record participants' responses on the left side of a flip chart. For each one, ask whether it was a challenge or a threat. You will use the right side later in this session.

What are some sources of stress that take place at work?

Before posing this question, explain that what one person finds stressful on the job may not be stressful for another person. The reading includes examples of the types of responses you can expect.

Record participants' responses on the left side of a flip chart. For each one, ask whether it was a challenge or a threat. You will use the right side later in this session.

What are some of the ways that adults respond to stress?

As you discuss the examples of ways adults respond to stress, explain that these are **normal** responses to stress and generally are **temporary**. They do not render people helpless to cope with their stress, nor do they make them unable to cope with the rest of their lives. They are presented here to help participants recognize how they may respond to the stress in their own lives. However, when these responses continue over a long period of time, the individual probably is not coping with the stress in a healthy way.

What are some things you do to handle stress?

As you review healthy and unhealthy ways to handle stress, be aware that many people do respond to stress in "unhealthy" ways. Encourage participants to try the "healthy" techniques because they are generally more effective and really do relieve tension.

What are some things you can do when stress becomes overwhelming?

Review the lists of sources of stress on and off the job recorded on a flip chart earlier in this session. For each source of stress, ask participants for suggestions of healthy ways to handle the stress. List these in the right column on the flip chart sheets.

Conclude this segment by acknowledging that the stress Head Start staff feel is very real and can be frustrating. It is important to use healthy techniques to handle stress so that it does not lead to burn-out.

B. Living in Multistressed Environments (45 minutes)

Lead a discussion on the sources of stress that are prevalent in contemporary society—particularly for Head Start families who are already dealing with the effects of poverty. Discuss how the societal sources of stress found in multistressed environments differ from the kinds of stress discussed in the first part of this session.

What sources of long-term significant stress might be experienced by Head Start families?

The reading provides examples of long-term significant stress. Tailor this discussion to address the types of stress prevalent in the community served by your Head Start program. Add to the list examples that are specific to your community.

What are some of the effects of living in a multistressed environment?

Note a few of these for participants. Tell them that they will focus on these effects in a later session.

How can classroom teams respond?

Explain to participants that most of the sessions in this staff development program will contribute to answering the question: How can classroom teams respond? To begin addressing this important question, conduct the activity described in *Handout 1-2: Accepting Families.*

The purpose of the activity is to help classroom teams acknowledge their feelings and learn to accept families without passing judgment on behaviors, lifestyles, or circumstances. The first page is a description of "Frankie," a child who shows signs of being affected by multiple sources of stress. The second page, "Laurie Jackson," expresses his mother's feelings on her way to a parent-teacher conference. The third page, "Ms. Reed," expresses the teacher's feelings as she waits for Ms. Jackson.

Each member of the classroom team will assume a different role. One will be Laurie Jackson, one Ms. Reed, and one an observer. Ms. Jackson and Ms. Reed will conduct a role play of the conference while the observer watches, listens, and takes notes. After the role play, team members will share their reactions to the conference. Participants can switch roles twice so that each person can have a turn playing the three roles.

After the teams have completed three role plays, lead a discussion on how to accept all children and families. Ask questions such as the following:

- What are Frankie's strengths? How can his mother and teacher work together to build on them?

- What are Ms. Jackson's strengths? How can she use them as the prime educator of her child?

- What are Ms. Reed's strengths? How can she use them to support Ms. Jackson as the prime educator of her child? ,to help Frankie grow and develop?

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share examples of the healthy ways they handle their own stress and what they might do to reduce or eliminate sources of stress in their lives.

- Distribute and review the Follow-Up Activities that are to be completed before you meet again. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 2
Head Start's Response

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- State the roles and responsibilities of Head Start component staff.
- Explain and give examples of how Head Start components work together.
- Describe the ways in which classroom teams work together.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (one copy per participant)
- *Final Rule on Head Start Services for Children with Disabilities* (one copy per participant)
- Handouts
  - 2-1: *How Our Head Start "Team" Works Together*
  - 2-2: *Component Coordination Log (Part 1)*
  - 2-3: *A Typical Day for Our Classroom Team*
- Follow-Up Activities
  - 2-1: *Component Coordination Log (Part 2)*
  - 2-2: *Component Classroom Visit*

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 1 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

Use the discussion to reinforce the following:

- Coping with multiple sources of stress can overwhelm children and families.
- Classroom teams can begin to help by accepting rather than judging children and families.
- It is important to help families identify and build on their strengths.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the session.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. The Head Start Team (45 minutes)

Provide individual copies of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* and *Final Rule on Head Start Services for Children with Disabilities.* These two documents serve as the "Reading" for this session. In this discussion, emphasize that the Head Start program is carried out by a team of staff, each responsible for a different component of the program. While each component has specific areas of expertise, they work together in a supportive manner. Individual staff members do not work in isolation. Classroom teams provide support for each other; however, they also have many colleagues who can work with them to help children and families receive the full benefits of Head Start.

Review the objectives for each component found in the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (June, 1992).

Health (1304.3-1, p. 15)
  Mental Health (1304.3-7, p. 33)
  Nutrition (1304.3-9, p. 38)
Social Services (1304.4-1, p. 53)
Parent Involvement (1304.5-1, p. 56)
Education Services (1304.2-1, p. 4)

Review the requirements found in the *Final Rule on Head Start Services for Children with Disabilities* (summarized on page 1 of the Information Memorandum) and the information on how other components work with the Disabilities Component as described in the following sections:

Disabilities/Health Services coordination (1308.18, p. 5508)
Education Services (1308.19, p. 5508)
Nutrition Services (1308.20, p. 5509)
Parent Involvement (1308.21, p. 5509)

Next, divide participants into small groups for the activity described in *Handout 2-1: How Our Head Start "Team" Works Together.* The activity encourages classroom teams to think about how your Head Start program works as a team. The handout includes descriptions of eight situations in which a classroom team has noticed a child or parent's need that should be addressed using a team approach. (If you prefer, make up other situations that would be more typical in your program.) Assign one or more situations to each small group. Each group will read the situation, then discuss how they would work with other component staff to respond to the family's needs. Ask each small group to share their responses. Be sure to address the system your program uses for referrals and follow-up among components.

B. Cross-Component Coordination (30 minutes)

This activity builds on the previous one by encouraging participants to focus on how the components in your program work together each day to accomplish the goals of Head Start. While the previous activity dealt with sample situations, in this one participants think back over the past month about the times they worked with another component to complete a task or to do something for a child or family. After recording several examples on *Handout 2-2: Component Coordination Log,* they can discuss their "logs" with their classroom team.

Ask each team to share its examples of component coordination. Clarify any inaccuracies or misunderstandings and answer questions about how the components in your program work together to provide services for children and families.

C. The Education Services Component (30 minutes)

Lead the group in a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the following individuals:

The Education Coordinator
Teachers
Assistants
Volunteers

You may want to provide copies of the job descriptions for the Education Services Component.

Your discussion is likely to point out that there is a lot of overlap because team members often share responsibilities. However, each team member has a unique role. Ask the classroom teams to think of a typical day in their classrooms. They will use *Handout 2-3: A Typical Day for Our Classroom Team* to list the roles and responsibilities each team member carried out during that typical day.

As participants share their responses, point out the ways staff support children and families.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to think about realistic, appropriate ways that Head Start can help children and families. What can Head Start to do to build on families' strengths and encourage greater social and economic self-sufficiency?

- Distribute and review the Follow-Up Activities that are to be completed before you meet again. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- Agree on where and when you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 3
Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Identify typical classroom behaviors that may indicate children are living in multistressed environments.
- Help children develop self-esteem.
- Encourage children's cognitive and physical development.

Materials

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- Reading
  3: Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments
- Handout
  3: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 1)
- Follow-Up Activities
  3-1: Encouraging a Child's Development
  3-2: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 2)

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 2 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

Use the discussion to reinforce the following:

- Head Start component staff can work together to successfully address the needs of families affected by multiple sources of stress.
- Each component can make a unique contribution in working with families.
- Classroom teams can make a big difference in a child's life when they work together to identify and respond positively to a child's needs.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. How Children Are Affected by Living in Multistressed Environments (35 minutes)

As you lead a discussion on how children are affected by high levels of stress, encourage participants to share their own thoughts and feelings about children's home and community environments. Some participants can particularly gain from an opportunity to vent frustration and anger towards families experiencing stress. For some individuals it may be a necessary step in learning to recognize the many stresses families face, and learning to accept children and families.

As you review the examples of classroom behaviors that might be exhibited by children living in multistressed environments, ask participants to share their own experiences working with children who exhibit behaviors similar to the ones in the examples. The examples of children's behaviors and teachers' responses are provided as "discussion starters." As you review the examples, you may think, "These sound like typical preschool children, not children who are affected by stress." It is true that typical preschool children may behave in these ways at times, however, **a highly stressed child is likely to exhibit several of these behaviors, day after day, and for long periods of time.**

The examples show a teacher's response within a classroom setting. The teacher would also consult with other classroom team members and component coordinators to address the child's needs.

End this segment of the training by explaining that the behaviors described in the examples might be due to a variety of stresses including: exposure to violence, child abuse or neglect, homelessness, and so on. Children do not respond to stress in the same ways that adults do. They may develop coping mechanisms that make it difficult to play and make friends with other children. Regardless of the cause of the stress, what children need most is a safe, supportive environment, including caring adults. They need many opportunities to play because play helps them cope with stress and develop friendships. Session 6 will discuss ways to help individual children cope with stress.

B. How Children Develop Self-Esteem (10 minutes)

Because self-esteem is important for sound development and learning, classroom teams need to understand how children develop a sense of self. During this discussion encourage participants to share examples from their own experiences of how children develop self-esteem.

C. Helping Children Learn to Trust (10 minutes)

Explain that children begin developing trust when they learn to rely on an adult such as a parent, caretaker, or teacher. Their feelings of trust grow as they develop friendships with other children. A once withdrawn child may begin acting out as she begins to develop trust. While staff may be frustrated and confused, the child is making progress. A newly developed sense of trust allows her to test the rules and boundaries of the classroom. Classroom teams need to continue supporting the child so she will learn that adults will continue to care for her even when she misbehaves.

D. Helping Children Develop Autonomy (10 minutes)

Ask participants to offer examples of how they help children develop and use self-help skills and how they help children who need to relax and explore their interests and skills.

E. Helping Children Develop In Other Domains (10 minutes)

Ask participants to share examples of what they do to promote cognitive and physical development.

F. Conducting Observations to Get to Know Individual Children (30 minutes)

Begin this training segment by reviewing the purposes of observation and suggested strategies for recording observation notes. (The amount of time you spend on this segment will depend on the skill levels of participants.) The bibliography in the *Introduction for Trainers* includes several resources on observing children's development.

Next, ask classroom teams to think of a child they would like to know more about. Individual team members will use *Handout 3: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 1)* to record what they already know about the child. (They will observe this child to learn more about his or her development as a follow-up activity for this session.) After reviewing this information ask classroom teams to discuss with each other what they have recorded on the handout. Are their responses similar or very different? What can they learn from each other about an individual child?

Explain that there are many more suggestions for meeting the needs of children who live in multistressed environments during the rest of these sessions. Note that as children grow and mature—gain self-esteem, use a variety of cognitive abilities, practice newly acquired motor skills—they are challenged. This challenge creates stress—the kind of stress that we normally think of as healthy. Children who live in multistressed environments need help from classroom teams to learn ways to cope with stress. How to provide this support will be discussed throughout these sessions.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share something learned during this session that can be used next week with children.

- Distribute and review Follow-Up Activities that are to be completed before you meet again. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 4

The Learning Environment

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Create a supportive Head Start environment for children who might be experiencing high levels of stress.
- Adapt the environment to provide appropriate levels of interest and challenge for all children.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs*
- Reading
  4: The Learning Environment
- Handout
  4: Adapting the Environment (Part 1)
- Follow-Up Activities
  4-1: Adapting the Environment (Part 2)
  4-2: Assessing the Environment
  4-3: The Daily Schedule

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 3 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

Use the discussion to reinforce the following:

- There are many different ways classroom teams can help children develop trust and autonomy, and promote cognitive and physical development.
- Development is a gradual process and it takes a long time for some children to progress to the next stage.
- Classroom teams need to observe carefully to see children's growing sense of trust and autonomy, and their growing cognitive and physical skills.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Supportive Head Start Environments (1 hour)

Lead a discussion on the characteristics of classroom environments that can help reduce children's stress. As you review each characteristic, ask participants to suggest ways they could adapt their indoor and outdoor environments. Remind participants that developmentally appropriate programs are individualized to respond to all children's skills, needs, and interests. In addition, developmentally appropriate programs adhere to Head Start's multicultural principles. The bulleted items in *Reading 4: The Learning Environment* are suggestions that may work in your program.

B. Changing the Environment to Meet a Child's Needs (45 minutes)

Handout 4: Adapting the Environment, is used for this activity. Ask classroom teams to focus on one area of the environment—for example, blocks, outdoors, dramatic play, library, sand and water—and list the toys, materials, and equipment located there.

Next, teams should focus on a child in the room who needs help to get positively involved in this area. The child might be one who is withdrawn and seldom gets involved with materials and activities. The child might have a short attention span, be very disruptive, or be over-whelmed by the area. Teams will discuss what this child might need to benefit from the area.

When teams have completed their plans, ask them to share their ideas with the other participants. Discuss the importance of making changes gradually, over time, so that children won't be overwhelmed by too many changes at once.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share something learned during this session that they can use next week with the children.

- Distribute and review the Follow-Up Activities that are to be completed before your next meeting. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 5
The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Develop and follow a balanced schedule with consistent routines and well-planned transitions.
- Adapt the daily schedule and transitions to meet the special needs of children who are highly stressed.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- Daily schedules on flip chart paper (Session 4 Follow-Up Activity)
- Reading
  5: The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions
- Handouts
  5-1: Handling Routines and Transitions
  5-2: Suggestions for Handling Routines and Transitions
- Follow-Up Activities
  5-1: Adapting the Schedule
  5-2: Adapting Routines and Transitions

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 4 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 4 Follow-Up Activities, reinforce the following:

- With careful planning, the environment can address a wide range of interests, skills, and needs.
- Changes in the environment should be made gradually so children won't be confused or overwhelmed.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Handling Disruptions in Our Lives (15 minutes)

Ask participants to think about a time during the past week when their schedules, routines, or transitions were disrupted and write down what happened, how they felt, and how they handled it. If needed, you can use the examples provided as prompters.

Draw three columns on a flip chart: What Happened?, How Did I Feel?, and How Did I Handle It? Ask participants to volunteer to share their responses to these three questions.

Ask participants what they do to minimize the stress brought on by disruptions. Do they make changes to avoid them in the future?

Next, ask participants to share examples from their work of how different children might respond when their home or classroom schedules, routines, or transitions are disrupted. If participants can't think of any examples, you can use the questions in the reading to stimulate discussion or make up some of your own.

Explain that disruptions to the daily schedule, routines, and transitions can be very disturbing for children who live in multistressed environments because they tend to have great needs for consistency and predictability in their lives. It is important to understand these needs and anticipate and plan for the times when children may have difficulty coping with changes in the day's events.

B. The Daily Schedule (20 minutes)

Review the purpose of the daily schedule and the characteristics of a well-planned schedule that supports children. You may want to write these characteristics on a flip chart.

Spend a few minutes discussing why large group activities can be particularly stressful for some children. Ask teams to describe what happens in their classrooms when children are gathered in a large group. Encourage them to plan daily schedules that allow children to be in small groups for most of the day.

Also, emphasize how important it is for children to have lots of time to play. For children with high levels of stress, play can be an important outlet and a way to try to make sense of what is going on in their lives.

Ask classroom teams to share with the group their own daily schedules, as recorded on flip chart paper. (This was a Session 4 Follow-Up Assignment.) Each team should discuss the following:

- What takes place during the day.
- How the schedule includes the characteristics described above.
- How the schedule helps children develop a sense of security.
- What happens when they change the schedule to take advantage of special events, "teachable moments," or emergencies.
- How they help children understand the order of daily events.
- How the schedule provides opportunities for using and developing skills.

C. Routines (20 minutes)

Summarize what children gain from participating in routines and why it is important to handle them thoughtfully. You can use the following discussion questions or make up your own:

- What are the daily routines in your own life?
- What are the daily routines in your classroom?
- Why is it important to perform routines in the same way each day?
- How can predictable, consistent routines help children who live in multistressed environments?

Use brainstorming to come up with some suggestions that classroom teams can use to help children during routines. Record these on a flip chart. You can use the suggestions in the reading as prompters or add them to the list if they aren't generated by participants.

D. Transitions (20 minutes)

Summarize why children who live in multistressed environments may need extra attention during transitions from one activity to the next. You can use the following discussion questions or make up your own:

- Why do you think children who live in multistressed environments might find transitions difficult?
- How do children behave when they find a transition difficult?
- What feelings are they trying to express?

Use brainstorming to come up with some suggestions that classroom teams can use to help children during transitions. Record these on a flip chart. You can use the suggestions in the reading as prompters or add them to the list if they aren't generated by participants.

E. Handling Routines and Transitions (30 minutes)

Handout 5-1: *Handling Routines and Transitions* describes six situations in which children have difficulty handling transitions. Divide the participants into small groups (3 or 6 per group, depending on how many participants are in attendance) and assign each group 1 or 2 situations. Ask the small groups to read and discuss the situations and develop strategies to help the children.

At the end of the discussion you can distribute *Handout 5-2: Suggestions for Handling Routines and Transitions* which includes some suggested strategies. These may repeat or be in addition to the strategies developed by the small groups. Discuss any new suggestions and determine whether they could be used in your program.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share something they plan to do differently in their classroom schedule, routine, or transitions, based on what they learned in this session.
- Distribute and review the Follow-Up Activities that are to be completed before you meet again. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.
- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 6
Helping Children Cope with Stress

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Help children develop acceptable coping skills.
- Use positive guidance techniques to help children learn self-discipline.
- Analyze the reasons for children's behavior.
- Develop strategies for handling children's challenging behaviors.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, tape
- Reading
  6: Helping Children Cope With Stress
- Handouts
  6-1: Helping Orlando Learn to Cope
  6-2: The Meaning Behind Children's Behavior
  6-3: Handling Challenging Behaviors
- Follow-Up Activity
  6: Using Positive Guidance Techniques

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 5 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

Use the discussion to reinforce the following:

- Children who live in multistressed environments have a great need for consistency and predictability.
- Careful planning of the schedule, routines, and transitions can reassure children and help them learn to trust.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Helping Individual Children Cope with Stress (30 minutes)

Use a flip chart to record examples of the kinds of stress all children have to cope with and the kinds of stress that affect children who live in multistressed environments. Refer back to your earlier discussions of this topic in Session 3. Discuss the following:

- How do the children in your classroom cope with different kinds of stress?
- How can you help children learn to cope?
- What can you do to help children learn "acceptable" coping mechanisms?

Next, review the important principles related to helping children learn to cope included in the reading (page 2-3) and record them on the flip chart. Then ask classroom teams to work together to come up with examples from their own classrooms of when they applied these principles. Ask classroom teams to share their examples.

Distribute *Handout 6-1: Helping Orlando Learn to Cope.* Ask participants to work in pairs to read and discuss this example of how a teacher helped a child learn to use appropriate coping skills. With the full group discuss the following:

- How do teachers know when to relax the rules to help a child cope?
- What goals did the teachers have for Orlando?
- What might happen if teachers don't help children like Orlando?

Review the information in the reading about how teachers model coping skills. As you discuss each example, ask the group for examples of modeling this coping skill.

B. The Reasons for Children's Behavior (20 minutes)

In this activity, classroom teams will work together to analyze what children might be trying to communicate through their behavior. First, teams will read the vignette on *Handout 6-2: The Meaning Behind Children's Behavior,* and answer the questions that follow. Next, they will describe a behavior of a child in their class and analyze possible reasons for this child's behavior.

Ask participants to share what they think are the reasons for Janine's behavior. Reasons might include the following:

- "I don't know how to use a pitcher."
- "I am afraid that I will get in trouble for spilling the milk."
- "I need to comfort myself, because I am scared."
- "I hope you will hear my crying and help me feel better."
- "I've had a really hard day. Spilling my milk pushed me over the edge."

Discuss what participants might do to help Janine cope with the situation. Ask participants to share their examples of children's behavior and what children may be trying to communicate.

C. Using Positive Guidance to Promote Self-Discipline (30 minutes)

In this discussion, emphasize that effective discipline helps children develop self-discipline, is individualized, and is based on realistic expectations for children's behavior.

As you review the positive guidance techniques described in the reading, ask participants to provide examples of when they used the technique or a similar one and how a child responded. Encourage participants to share their own ideas for positive guidance.

D. Handling Challenging Behaviors (25 minutes)

After leading a discussion on ways to handle challenging behaviors, ask participants to work in four small groups to discuss challenging behaviors and to generate strategies for addressing them. Participants might discuss:

- What makes these behaviors "challenging?"
- How can teachers individualize effective strategies?
- How can teachers preserve children's self-esteem while dealing with the challenging behavior?
- How can teachers help children learn positive ways to cope with stress?

Ask each group to share their strategies. You can use the information in the reading to summarize these discussions.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share an example of something they learned in this session that they can use to help a child learn to cope.

- Distribute and review the Follow-Up Activities that are to be completed before you meet again.. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 7
Supporting Parents

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Describe how parents are involved in the Head Start program.
- Implement strategies for supporting parents.
- Accept children and families without passing judgment.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- Reading
  7: Supporting Parents
- Handouts
  7-1: Effective Parent Education Techniques
  7-2: Accepting Families
- Follow Up Activity
  7: Maintaining Strong Partnerships

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 6 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 6 Follow-Up Activities, reinforce the following:

- The behaviors children use to cope are signs of their stress.
- Classroom teams may not be able to address the sources of children's stress but they can help them learn acceptable ways to cope.
- Using positive guidance will help children develop self-discipline, which allows children to have a sense of control over their lives.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. The Role of Parents in Head Start (15 minutes)

As you review the role of parents, provide several examples of how the Health, Social Services, and Parent Involvement Components in your program support parents.

Explain that the Education Services Component's role in supporting parents is defined in the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* in three of the Education services objectives. As your review the objectives ask participants for examples of what they do to meet each one.

B. How the Education Services Component Can Support Parents (15 minutes)

As you review the suggestions in the reading, ask participants for examples of what they do to support parents. Remind participants that some of these suggestions can be implemented by the Education Services Component alone. Others can be accomplished in conjunction with other components.

C. Effective Parent Education Techniques (30 minutes)

Handout 7-1: Effective Parent Education Techniques includes several "stories" based on the experiences of a Head Start teacher. Ask participants to read each one and discuss their reactions with their classroom teams. The second part of the activity asks participants to write their own "stories" and prepare to share them with the full group.

Reconvene the group and ask classroom teams to share their own "stories" about effective parent education techniques. Next, ask the group to identify what these techniques have in common. Generate a list of "Principles of Effective Parent Education Techniques."

D. Acknowledging Your Feelings (20 minutes)

Begin by discussing the difficulties that can arise when classroom teams become overwhelmed and have trouble accepting families. Next, explain that the purpose of this activity is to help participants identify negative or judgmental feelings they may have about children and families.

Use a piece of flip chart paper to label the left side of one wall as the area representing "totally agree." Label the right side as "totally disagree." Ask participants to imagine a line drawn on the floor between these two signs. Tell them that the left end of the line represents their total disagreement with a statement. The right end represents their total agreement with a statement. The line forms a continuum of disagreement and agreement. Ask participants to stand on a place on the line that represents their feelings about each of the following statements. After participants place themselves on the continuum, ask a few volunteers to share the reasons for their responses.

- Families who are homeless are victims of hard times.
  ("Ask, Why did you respond as you did?")
- Substance abusers have a physical addiction and need treatment.
  ("Ask, Why did you respond as you did?')
- Teenage parents should care for their own children. They should not expect the child's grandparents to take over.
  ("Ask, Why did you respond as you did?")

E. Accepting Families (25 minutes)

Ideally this activity will be conducted by the Mental Health Specialist, who may want to adapt it to reflect the program's needs and characteristics. On a national level, 35 percent of Head Start staff are former Head Start parents. In some programs, many staff live in the same community as Head Start families. These characteristics can lead staff to be very empathetic towards families. On the other hand, staff may have strong feelings about what they think Head Start parents **should** do. It can be helpful to explore these feelings.

Handout 7-2: Accepting Families is used for this activity. Ask participants to think of a child and family whom they find difficult to accept. Tell them to write down all of their negative feelings toward this family. For example, "He only wants to do what he wants to do." "She ran out of money before the end of the month, again, so her daughter comes to Head Start hungry." Assure the group that nobody will see their papers and after they are finished they can throw them away.

Now, ask participants to think of the same child and family and make a list of their strengths. For example, "He really enjoys the block area," or "She comes to all the parent workshops." Some people may find this to be a difficult task, so offer lots of support and encouragement. The lists don't need to be long—two or three items are sufficient. You might want to ask staff to think of their own strengths and how they can be applied to working with this child and family.

Finally, participants should plan ways to use the strengths as they work with the child and family. Ask for volunteers to share their plans. If there are no volunteers continue with the agenda. Participants may not want to share their feelings openly.

Explain to participants that this exercise is a first step in learning to accept children and families. It can take a long time to learn to accept rather than to judge.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share something they plan to do to support parents.

- Distribute and review the Follow-Up Activity that is to be completed before you meet again. It will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- Remind participants of when and where you will meet for the next session. Give a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Session 8
An Approach to Problem Solving

Overview for Trainers

Objectives

This session will enable participants to:

- Use problem solving techniques to develop strategies for helping individual children.
- Establish ongoing support groups.

Materials and Equipment

- Flip chart, markers, and tape
- Reading
  8: An Approach to Problem Solving
- Handouts
  8-1: Problem Solving Format
  8-2: Support Groups

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 7 Follow Up Activities (10 minutes)

Use the discussion to reinforce the following:

- Maintaining strong partnerships between parents and staff benefits everyone, especially the children.
- The Education Services Component can support parents so that they will feel like competent, independent adults.

Answer questions and/or address participants' concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Using Problem Solving to Identify and Address Children's Needs (1 hour)

Reading 8: An Approach to Problem Solving shows how a classroom team examined the reasons for a child's behavior and developed strategies for helping the child. The example introduces the steps in problem solving. Participants can use the reading to follow along during the discussion. Be sure to point out that some families are so stressed that they cannot deal with the questions posed by well-intentioned program staff. Talk about how to proceed in these situations. Also distribute *Handout 8-1: Problem Solving Format,* which is a blank form participants can use in the future.

B. Establishing an Ongoing Support Group (50 minutes)

Use *Handout 8-2: Support Groups* and the questions below to discuss whether to continue meeting as an ongoing support group, facilitated by the Education Coordinator and/or the Mental Health Specialist (or other component coordinator as appropriate in your program). Emphasize that the facilitator's role would be to guide the discussions and contribute ideas based on classroom observations. Participants would serve as resources to each other.

- Were the problem solving strategies presented in this session useful?
- Would you like to continue meeting as a support group to brainstorm other problems or discuss individual children's behaviors and needs?
- What format would you suggest for future meetings? Meetings could focus on a specific topic, the needs of individual children, or be open-ended.

If you decide to continue meeting you will need to agree on when, for how long, how frequently, and where. At your first meeting, you can review the ground rules and logistics.

If you decide not to continue meeting, congratulate the classroom teams for their hard work in these sessions and let them know that you will continue to be available as a resource. (You might want to provide certificates or other concrete evidence of their accomplishments.) Remind them that they also can refer to the readings, handouts, and follow-up activities used in the sessions.

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Session 1
Responding to Stress

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Recognize the sources of stress that can affect adults.
- Understand physiological, physical, and psychological responses to stress.
- Handle stress in healthy rather than unhealthy ways.
- Describe how families are affected by multistressed environments.
- Plan ways to work as a team to assist children and families.

Materials

- Reading
  1: Responding to Stress
- Handouts
  1-1: Responding to Children Under Stress—Session Overviews
  1-2: Accepting Families
- Follow-Up Activities
  1-1: Daily Log
  1-2: Life in a Multistressed Environment

Agenda

I. Presentation of the Content and Format of the Sessions (10 minutes)

- The purpose of the staff development program is to suggest practical strategies for working with children and families who are living with high levels of stress and to provide ongoing support for classroom teams.

- The first seven sessions are designed to help you develop skills and knowledge. The last session provides guidance on establishing an ongoing support group for classroom teams (teachers, assistants, volunteers).

- For each session you will receive a reading, handouts, and follow-up activities. The **reading** summarizes the content of the session, the **handouts** are used for learning activities during the session, and the **follow-up activities** are used by classroom teams to apply the information gained through the session as they work with individual children.

- Classroom teams will work together during the sessions and to complete follow-up activities.

- *Handout 1-1: Responding to Children Under Stress—Session Overviews* provides a brief summary of each two-hour session.

- You can ask questions and/or voice your concerns before each session begins.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Your Own Experiences With Stress (1 hour)

First, the group will discuss stress: the kinds you experience, how you cope, what you do to minimize sources of stress, and what happens when it gets out of control. It is important to recognize your own responses to stress and to learn how to handle it effectively because your job (working with children and families) can be very demanding. Think about the question: What is stress? The definition in the reading may get you started.

What are some sources of stress in your life outside of work?

Your trainer will write down the sources of stress suggested by you and the other participants on the left side of a flip chart. Think about whether you perceived the stress as a challenge or a threat. You will use the right side of the flip chart later in this session.

What are some sources of stress that take place at work?

Your trainer will write down the work-related sources of stress suggested by you and the other participants on the left side of a clean sheet of flip chart paper. Think about whether you perceived the stress as a challenge or a threat. You will use the right side of the flip chart later in this session.

What are some of the ways that adults respond to stress?

Most of the ways adults respond to stress are **normal** and generally are **temporary**. They do not render people helpless to cope with their stress, nor do they make them unable to cope with the rest of their lives. They are presented in the reading to help you recognize how you may respond to the stress in your own life.

What are some things you do to handle stress?

As you review healthy and unhealthy ways to handle stress, be aware that many people respond to stress in "unhealthy" ways. Try to use the "healthy" techniques because they are generally more effective and really do relieve tension.

What are some things you can you do when stress becomes overwhelming?

The group will review the lists of sources of stress on and off the job recorded on a flip chart earlier in this session. For each source of stress, you and the other participants can suggest healthy ways to handle the stress. These will be listed in the right column on the flip chart.

B. Living in Multistressed Environments (45 minutes)

As you participate in this discussion, think about the following:

- How do the sources of stress found in multistressed environments differ from the kinds of stress discussed in the first part of this session.
- What types of stress are prevalent in the community served by your Head Start program?

Most of the sessions in this staff development program will contribute to answering the question: How can classroom teams respond? To begin addressing this important question, you will participate in a learning activity with your classroom team. *Handout 1-2: Accepting Families* includes the materials you will need to conduct several role plays.

After the role plays, your trainer will lead a discussion on how to accept all children and families. You will consider questions such as the following:

- What are Frankie's strengths? How can his mother and teacher work together to build on them?
- What are Ms. Jackson's strengths? How can she use them as the prime educator of her child?
- What are Ms. Reed's strengths? How can she use them to support Ms. Jackson as the prime educator of her child? To help Frankie grow and develop?

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Participants will share examples of the healthy ways they handle their own stress and what they might do to reduce or eliminate sources of stress in their lives.
- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 1-1: Daily Log* and/or *Follow-Up Activity 1-2: Life in a Multistressed Environment* before your next meeting. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.
- The group will agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Reading 1: Responding to Stress

Your Own Experiences With Stress

Stress can be defined as:

> A characteristic of the environment or the social situation of the individual that poses a threat to the individual and requires that the individual use personal, physiological, physical, or psychological resources to meet the real or perceived threat.

Or, more simply:

> Any change that you must adjust to.

Stress occurs when we perceive a threat, regardless of whether the threat is real or imaginary. For example, imagine yourself stuck in traffic one morning on your way to work. When you first get stuck you don't know if the traffic jam will quickly clear or if you will be stuck for an hour. Thus, the threat you perceive (being late to work) may be real or imaginary. Because you don't know how the traffic jam will turn out, you may respond by panicking. If the traffic does clear, you must still recover from the effects of feeling stressed.

Stress can be very helpful to us in responding to every day life situations and to emergency situations. In the above example, the stress you feel in the traffic jam may cause you to change your morning routine so you can leave earlier and avoid future traffic jams. It might cause you to try a different route around the traffic jam. We all experience a certain level of stress. To be completely free of stress is to be dead.

Change in a person's life can be perceived as a threat or a challenge. Both situations, threat and challenge, involve stress, but stress does not always have to be bad. When you perceive a situation as threatening, it is difficult to use your problem solving skills. However, when you perceive a situation as challenging, often you can use those problem solving skills to cope with the situation.

What are some sources of stress in your life outside of work?

The sources of stress in your personal life may differ from those of your colleagues. What is stressful for one person may not be for another. In addition, not all stress is negative. Many joyous occasions such as the birth of a child, a wedding, or a graduation also can cause stress. Sometimes, feelings of stress can give people the extra energy they need to tackle a difficult job, handle a dangerous situation, or respond in an emergency.

Some sources of stress have relatively short-term effects:

- being caught in traffic on the way to work;
- finding something to wear to church;
- having a disagreement with a spouse or child;
- getting ready for a party;
- running out of an ingredient needed to cook dinner; or
- getting caught in a rain storm.

Other sources of stress have more long-term effects:

- living on a strict budget;
- getting divorced;
- being the parent of a child with a disability;
- getting married;
- being evicted;
- making funeral arrangements for a close friend or relative;
- returning to college;
- losing a job; or
- caring for a family member during a long-term illness.

What are some sources of stress that take place at work?

Stress on the job is a normal part of daily life for many people. Work-related stress might be due to a variety of situations such as:

- disagreeing with a colleague or supervisor;
- running out of materials in the middle of an activity;
- handling a child who is having a tantrum;
- caring for children who have many problems in their lives; or
- working with a parent whose problems are over-whelming.

What are some of the ways that adults respond to stress?

Not everyone is affected by the same sources of stress, nor do we react to stress in the same ways. Stress can bring on reactions such as the following:

- Socio-emotional responses:
  - feeling inadequate;
  - lowered self-esteem;
  - anger directed at self and/or others;
  - sadness, mild depression;
  - impatience;
  - fear of losing control;
  - clinging to others;
  - withdrawal from others; and
  - mood swings.

- Physical responses:
  - increased pulse, racing heart;
  - increased or decreased appetite;
  - excitability, hyperactivity;
  - always feeling tired;
  - unable to relax, trouble sleeping; and
  - unable to stay awake.

- Cognitive responses:
  - racing thoughts;
  - unable to solve simple problems;
  - have to think about performing routine tasks (e.g., getting ready for work in the morning);
  - forgetfulness; and
  - unable to stick to a task.

When these responses continue over a long period of time, the individual probably is not coping with the stress. For example, if a person has mood swings for a few days while handling a difficult situation, there is no cause for alarm. If, however, the mood swings continue for weeks or months, the individual may need more help in coping with stress.

What are some things you can do to handle stress?

It's almost impossible to eliminate all of the sources of stress in our lives. Instead, we need to learn how to cope in healthy ways so the stress does not lead to "burn-out." Some examples of unhealthy and healthy ways to handle stress follow:

- Unhealthy ways to handle stress include:
  - Eating salty, fat-filled, or sugary snacks;
  - Taking out frustration by mistreating friends, family members, or colleagues;
  - Worrying;
  - Spending too much money;
  - Sleeping more than is needed;
  - Throwing, kicking, or breaking things;
  - Abusing alcohol or other drugs;
  - Withdrawing; and
  - Trying to solve all of the problems faced by a child or family, rather than participating as part of a team to support families as they work towards self-sufficiency.

- Healthy ways to handle stress include:
  - Exercising—take a walk, go for a bike ride, do aerobics;
  - Taking a shower or bath;
  - Pampering yourself;
  - Listening to music;
  - Talking to someone about your feelings;

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- Making a "to do" list, then crossing off what you don't really need to do;
- Establishing priorities and a schedule for the tasks you must do;
- Asking for help from friends and family;
- Asking for help from professionals; and
- Working with colleagues, rather than in isolation, to help a child or family.

Most people handle stress using a variety of healthy and unhealthy strategies. If you try to use more of the "healthy" strategies, you will find that they generally are more effective and really do relieve tension.

What are some things you can do when stress becomes overwhelming?

There are times when adults face situations that are overwhelming. These overwhelming situations may bring on a type or amount of stress that is beyond what has been discussed thus far. These adults are having difficulty coping with stress. As long as they internalize feelings rather than act upon them, their tension levels rise. Prolonged, unmanaged stress can result in physical illnesses, mental health problems, or breakdowns in interpersonal relationships.

The stress that some Head Start staff experience is very real and tends to be frustrating. Using healthy techniques to manage stress can help you "get back on track" and prevent "burn-out." Managing your own stress is especially important if you work with children and families living in multistressed environments.

Living in Multistressed Environments

A multistressed environment is one in which children and families are affected over a long period of time by one or more sources of significant stress such as domestic or community violence, homelessness, substance abuse, or lack of basic necessities. The stresses are not caused by single events such as divorce or death of a parent. Rather, they are routine, un-relenting, and woven into daily life. They are a result of societal conditions and pressures that are beyond the control of individual families.

The coping strategies discussed earlier in this session will not provide much relief from these unrelenting sources of stress. Families may be able to develop strategies for resolving the stress in their lives; however, there are many situations over which they have no control.

What sources of long-term, significant stress might be experienced by Head Start families?

The following are examples of sources of long-term, significant stress that might be experienced by Head Start families. There may be other sources that are specific to your community.

- **Unemployment and other economic needs.** Parents may be unemployed, underemployed, or lack the education and skills to find work.
- **Lack of necessities.** Families may have insufficient food, clothing, shelter, or medical care; or lack transportation to work, a training program, or a health clinic.
- **Exposure to violence.** Adults and children may be exposed to violence in the home (such as spouse abuse) or in the community.
- **Homelessness.** A family might live in a shelter or other temporary housing situation.
- **Overcrowded or inadequate housing.** A large family may have to share a small living space. It may be difficult to find a place to get away to when an individual needs some time alone. A family may live in a home without facilities necessary for basic needs, or, the home may be unsafe.
- **Disability of a child or other family member.** Families may not have access to needed services or support.
- **Substance abuse.** A parent, family member, or other person living in the household might use or sell illegal substances. Alcohol abuse may be a problem for a family member. Substance abuse in the community at large also can affect the family, even though no one in the immediate family is directly involved with substance abuse.
- **Chronic illness (including HIV infection).** One or more members of the family may be chronically ill.
- **Abuse and neglect.** The child may be a victim of one or more form of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual) or neglect. Parents may be recovering from abuse or neglect experienced when they were children.
- **Depression and other mental illness.** Parents may suffer from depression or other mental illness.

- **Lack of emotional support.** Single and teenage parents in particular may lack the support they need to raise their children.
- **Learning a new language and adapting to a new culture.** Some non-English speaking parents may find it very difficult to communicate. In addition, becoming familiar with a new culture can be stressful at times.

What are some of the effects of living in a multistressed environment?

Families tend to have similar concerns, needs, and behaviors, regardless of what is causing the high levels of stress in their lives. Some families have the skills and strength needed to cope with their stress in positive ways. However, some families are overwhelmed by their stressful environment. They may experience effects such as the following:

- Life can be unstable, unpredictable, and chaotic, making it difficult for children to develop a sense of trust, which is critical to healthy growth and development.
- For some parents, high levels of stress may make it difficult to nurture their children.
- Children's nutritional needs may not be met.
- Families may not have access to needed health care, including immunizations and dental checkups.
- Parental discipline may be inconsistent, overly punitive, or nonexistent.

Handout 1-1: Responding to Children Under Stress—Session Overviews

The purpose of this staff development program is to suggest practical strategies for working with children and families who are living with high levels of stress and to provide ongoing support for classroom teams. The term **classroom team** refers to master teachers, teachers, assistants, aides, classroom volunteers, and other adults who work directly with children. Occasionally, the term **teacher** is used to designate any of the above team members.

1. **Responding to Stress** addresses the meaning of stress, discusses healthy and unhealthy ways to manage stress, and describes the conditions that may exist in multistressed environments. Participants complete an activity related to accepting families.

2. **Head Start's Response** reviews the roles and responsibilities of each Head Start component. Classroom teams define the constructive roles they play in working with children and families, both within the classroom and in conjunction with other components.

3. **Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments** reviews the signs that a child may be experiencing high levels of stress. Next comes an overview of how children develop self-esteem and what classroom teams can do to support children as they develop self-esteem and other skills. There is a brief review of observation and recording. An activity focuses on getting to know individual children.

4. **The Learning Environment** describes some elements of a supportive environment that can contribute to meeting the needs of all children in the group. Classroom teams focus on an individual child and suggest ways to adapt the environment to meet the child's needs.

5. **The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions** begins with a discussion of how participants respond to disruptions in their daily schedule, routines, or transitions and how children typically respond to disruptions in their lives at home or Head Start. The importance of predictable, consistent schedules, routines, and transitions is emphasized. Classroom teams review situations in which children have difficulty handling transitions and develop strategies for helping the children cope.

6. **Helping Children Cope with Stress** describes the coping strategies that children may use and how classroom teams can help children learn more acceptable ways to cope. Participants discuss individualizing positive guidance, based on knowledge of child development and children's individual strengths, needs, interests, and temperament. Use of systematic observations is emphasized. Strategies for handling challenging behaviors are presented and teams analyze possible reasons for a child's behavior.

7. **Supporting Parents** reviews the role of parents in Head Start and offers examples of how staff can support parents. The importance of accepting parents without passing judgment is emphasized. Classroom teams read and discuss "stories" based on the experiences of a Head Start teacher.

8. **An Approach to Problem Solving** provides a format for analyzing and developing strategies for addressing specific problems. This session also is the planning meeting for defining the goals and format for an ongoing support group.

Handout 1-2: Accepting Families

In this activity, classroom teams will work together to conduct role plays of a parent-teacher conference. Below is a description of "Frankie," a child who shows signs of being affected by multiple sources of stress. The second page, "Laurie Jackson," describes his mother's feelings on her way to the conference. The third page, "Ms. Reed," expresses the teacher's feelings as she waits for Laurie.

Each member of the team will assume a different role: Ms. Jackson, Ms. Reed, or an observer. Ms. Jackson and Ms. Reed will conduct a role play of the conference while the observer watches, listens, and takes notes. After the role play, share your reactions to the conference with your classroom team. Switch roles and repeat the role play twice so that each person can have a turn playing the three roles.

Frankie

Frankie (4 years old) has been in your class for about two months. During this time he has had a difficult time adjusting to the adults and children. He plays alone most of the time, and speaks only when spoken to. When he does speak it's hard to understand what he's saying. He's so quiet that sometimes the classroom team forgets he's there. One of his favorite activities is painting at the easel. He will spend a long time painting circles and squiggles. Frankie has difficulty using materials that require fine motor skills. For example, he can't put Legos® together or get the top off the toothpaste. His gross motor skills also are poorly developed. He likes to ride a tricycle by pushing with his feet, but he cannot pedal. Frankie's screening results indicated the need for a thorough assessment, but it hasn't taken place yet due to scheduling problems. Each time it has been scheduled, Frankie has been absent.

Frankie's mother is 19. He calls her by her first name, Laurie, and calls his grandmother Momma. When Frankie was born, Laurie dropped out of school and went on welfare. For a while Frankie and his mom had their own apartment; then they moved in with Laurie's boyfriend, Troy. Troy got into some drug-related trouble and moved away. Laurie and Frankie now live in "Momma's" two-bedroom apartment. Other members of the household include Laurie's-sister, Kate, and Kate's two children (a baby and a 3-year-old). Frankie is very attached to his cousin, who also is enrolled in Head Start. The three children share one room, Momma has the other, and Laurie and Kate sleep in the living room. Uncle Jake sets up a cot in the hall. This arrangement works well because Laurie and Kate like to go out at night and come back pretty late. To be safe from stray bullets, sometimes the children sleep in the bathroom.

Recently, Laurie began volunteering in the classroom. She noticed that Frankie doesn't play with the other children and that there are others his age who can pedal the tricycles, cut with scissors, pretend to be firefighters, and so on. Yesterday Laurie asked Ms. Reed, one of the teachers, "What's wrong with Frankie? He's so clumsy and he's always by himself." Ms. Reed offered to meet with Laurie to discuss her concerns about her son. They agreed on today at 3:30 p.m. as a good time for a conference.

It's 4:00 and Laurie just showed up.

Laurie Jackson

You are out of breath from running to the center from the bus stop. You were taking care of your sister's baby so you had to wait for Momma to come home to take over for you. She was late getting home from work and then your bus was late.

You like being a classroom volunteer because you think kids are cute and it's fun to be with your son. You hope that Ms. Reed will still be there because you are really worried about Frankie.

You like to go out in the evenings so you and your sister let Momma take care of the kids. She can handle Frankie better than you can. The children are afraid of Momma so they do what she tells them to do. You figure she's got more experience as a parent than you, so you might as well let her take care of the kids. When you pay attention to Frankie, Momma says you are spoiling him. Maybe you should have had Momma come to the conference instead of you.

You come into the room and say, "I'm really sorry, Ms. Reed. I hurried the best I could."

Ms. Reed

To prepare for this conference, you reviewed the classroom team's observation notes on Frankie and have a lot of information to share. You think Frankie has many, many problems, some of which you didn't notice until Ms. Jackson pointed them out. You think Frankie needs to get help immediately.

You look at your watch one more time, then finally hear footsteps on the stairs. Out of breath, Laurie Jackson comes in the door. She says, "I'm really sorry. I hurried the best I could." You smile and say, "It's okay, Ms. Jackson, I had some paper work to finish." That's not how you feel, however. Behind your smile you are thinking, "If she really cared about Frankie she would have been here on time."

Follow-Up Activity 1-1: Daily Log

Identify a child you think may be affected by high levels of stress. For the next week keep a daily log of what you did to help meet this child's needs. Note what the child did that led you to think he or she needed help, and what you did in response. There is an example on the log below. You can use this format, or one of your own. Each day spend a few minutes with your classroom team comparing your logs. At the end of the week meet as a team to discuss what each person can do to promote the child's development and to support each other.

What the Child Did	What You Did	What Happened
Day One **Example:** *Gerald asked for snack as soon as he arrived at program, and breakfast won't be served until 9:15.*	*Put snack out on table so all children can serve themselves when they are hungry.*	*Gerald got his own snack, then got involved in activities.*
Day Two		

Child's Need	What You Did	What Happened
Day Three		
Day Four		

Child's Need	What You Did	What Happened
Day Five		

At the end of the week discuss what each member of the team can do to promote the child's growth and development and support each other.

Follow-Up Activity 1-2: Life in a Multistressed Environment

Select a child and family you think might be living in a multistressed environment and answer the questions below.

1. **What sources of stress do you think this family is experiencing?**

2. **What are the strengths of this child and family?**

3. **What might be the effects of these sources of stress on the child(ren) in this family?**

4. **What might be the effects of these sources of stress on the adults in the family?**

5. **What can your classroom team do to assist this child and family?**

Discuss your responses with the classroom team. Children and families respond to high levels of stress in different ways. It is important to identify and support their individual strengths.

Session 2
Head Start's Response

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- State the roles and responsibilities of Head Start component staff.
- Explain and give examples of how Head Start components work together.
- Describe the ways in which classroom teams work together.

Materials

- *Head Start Program Performance Standards*
- *Final Rule on Head Start Services for Children with Disabilities*
- Handouts
  - 2-1: *How Our Head Start "Team" Works Together*
  - 2-2: *Component Coordination Log (Part 1)*
  - 2-3: *A Typical Day for Our Classroom Team*
- Follow-Up Activities
  - 2-1: *Component Coordination Log (Part 2)*
  - 2-2: *Component Classroom Visit*

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 1 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 1 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- Coping with multiple sources of stress can overwhelm children and families.
- Classroom teams can begin to help by accepting rather than judging children and families.
- It is important to help families identify and build on their strengths.

You can ask questions and/or voice concerns before the session begins.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. The Head Start Team (45 minutes)

Your copy of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* and the *Final Rule on Head Start Services for Children with Disabilities* are the "Reading" for this session. In this discussion you will review how the Head Start program is carried out by a team of staff, each responsible for a different component. While the components have specific areas of expertise, they work together in a supportive manner. Individual staff members do not work in isolation. Classroom teams provide support for each other; however, they also have many colleagues who can work with them to help children and families receive the full benefits of being enrolled in Head Start.

Participants will work in small groups for the activity described on *Handout 2-1: How Our Head Start "Team" Works Together.* The handout includes descriptions of eight situations in which a classroom team member has noticed a child or parent's need that should be addressed using a team approach. Your trainer will assign one or more situations to each small group. Each group will read the situation, discuss how they would work with other component staff to respond to the family's needs, then share their responses with the full group.

B. Cross-Component Coordination (30 minutes)

In this activity you will think back over the past month about the times you worked with another component to complete a task or to do something for a child or family. You will record these examples on *Handout 2-2: Component Coordination Log.* After noting several examples of cross-component coordination, you will discuss your "log" with your classroom team.

As each team shares its examples of component coordination, your trainer will clarify any inaccuracies or misunderstandings and answer questions about each component's responsibilities.

C. The Education Services Component (30 minutes)

As you discuss the roles and responsibilities of the following staff—the Education Coordinator, teachers, assistants, and volunteers—you may see that there is a lot of overlap because team members share responsibilities. Within each team, however, each individual has a unique role. With your classroom team, think of a typical day in your classroom. You will use *Handout 2-3: A Typical Day for Our Classroom Team* to list the roles and responsibilities each team member carried out that day.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Think about realistic, appropriate ways that Head Start can help children and families. How can Head Start build on family strengths and encourage greater social and economic self-sufficiency?

- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 2-1: Component Coordination Log* and/or *Follow-Up Activity 2-2: Component Classroom Visit* before your next meeting. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- The group will agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Handout 2-1: How Our Head Start "Team" Works Together

In a small group discuss how the component staff in your Head Start program might work together to address the needs described in the following situations. Your trainer will ask you to discuss one or more situations. Assume that you are the classroom team member who has noticed the need. Use the questions below to guide your discussion. Be prepared to discuss your responses with the other participants.

How Would Your Head Start Team Respond In These Situations?

1. When a parent brings her son to the program one morning, she tells the teacher that he is probably hungry because she didn't have any food at home.
2. A child appears to be very withdrawn, seldom playing with others and spending most of the day by himself.
3. Several parents complain to the teacher that the meals at Head Start don't taste like what they cook at home.
4. A child has had a cough for more than a month. His grandmother says she has not taken him to see a doctor, because she knows he will get better when the weather gets warmer.
5. At an Education Component meeting the teachers report that many children are tired when they arrive in the morning. Their parents say that the children don't get to sleep until 10 or 11 p.m.
6. A parent asks a teacher how she can become a classroom volunteer.
7. In a meeting to plan home visits, a classroom team member says that she is too scared to go to one of the neighborhoods where many Head Start families live.
8. A parent faints in the classroom. When she recovers she says that she is 3 months pregnant and has not seen a doctor.

1. What does this child or parent seem to need?

____

____

____

____

2. Which component staff member would you discuss this situation with first?

____

____

____

____

3. What other components might be involved in responding to the need?

4. What action might each component take?

5. How would component staff follow up with each other?

6. If referrals are needed, who will make them and who will follow up to find out what services were provided?

7. What changes would you make in the system your program currently follows for component coordination?

Handout 2-2: Component Coordination Log (Part 1)

Think back over the past month about the times you worked with another component to complete a task or to do something for a child or family. Record these examples on the format below. Examples are provided for each component. After you have noted several examples, discuss your "log" with your classroom team.

What *Disabilities* Component Did	What You Did	How You Followed Up
Example: *At my request, observed child who seems to have developmental delays. Suggested strategies to foster the child's development.*	*Implemented suggestions and observed the child several times in the next week.*	*Let coordinator know how the child was progressing.*

What *Health* * Component Did	What You Did	How You Followed Up
Example: *Provided information on upcoming Health Fair.*	*Sent notices home with children.*	*Asked parents if they attended.* *Congratulated coordinator on success of Health Fair.*

*Include mental health and nutrition under the Health Component.

What *Social Services* Component Did	What You Did	How You Followed Up
Example: *Made home visit to see if family had a special need such as clothing or transportation.*	*Let social worker know that child was often not appropriately dressed for the weather.*	*Let social worker know when child comes more appropriately dressed.*

What *Parent Involvement* Component Did	What You Did	How You Followed Up
Example: *Made personal contact with parents to invite them to visit program.*	*Welcomed parents to classroom. Allowed parents to join in when they felt comfortable.*	*Let coordinator know which parents are classroom volunteers.*

Handout 2-3: A Typical Day for Our Classroom Team

Complete this chart indicating the roles and responsibilities of team members during various daily events (these may not be listed in the same order as they occur in your program). You might want to add or change the daily events to match your schedule.

Team Member	Roles and Responsibilities
Example:	
Ms. Carter	*Greeted parents and children*
Mrs. Logan	*Set up interest areas*
Ms. Noonan	*Comforted crying child*
Arrival	
Free Play	
Routines and Transitions	
Outdoor Play	
Lunch/Snack	
Rest/Nap Time	
Departure	

Follow-Up Activity 2-1: Component Coordination Log (Part 2)

During the next week continue to note the times you work with another component to complete a task or to do something for a child or family. Record these examples on *Handout 2-2: Component Coordination Log*. At the end of the week, discuss your "log" with your classroom team.

Follow-Up Activity 2-2: Component Classroom Visit

Invite a staff member from another component to visit your classroom to learn more about the daily lives of children. (If component staff regularly visit your classroom, ask someone to make a special visit to focus on a particular child or on how you handle a specific routine or time of the day.) Follow up to learn the visitor's impressions, answer questions about what he or she saw during the visit, and discuss ways to address children's individual needs. Use the format provided or one of your own to summarize this activity.

Visitor: ____________________ **Component:** ____________________

What did this visitor see in your classroom and what suggestions did she or he make?

How do you and this individual plan to follow up on the visit?

You have many colleagues in Head Start who can help you support children and families.

Session 3
Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Identify typical classroom behaviors that may indicate children are living in multistressed environments.
- Help children develop self-esteem.
- Encourage children's cognitive and physical development.

Materials

- Reading
  3: Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments
- Handout
  3: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 1)
- Follow-Up Activities
  3-1: Encouraging a Child's Development
  3-2: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 2)

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 2 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 2 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- Head Start component staff can work together to successfully address the needs of families affected by multiple sources of stress.
- Each component can make a unique contribution in working with families.
- Classroom teams can make a big difference in a child's life when they work together to identify and respond positively to a child's needs.

You can ask questions and/or voice concerns before the session begins.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. How Children Are Affected by Living in Multistressed Environments (35 minutes)

As you participate in the discussion, you can share your own thoughts and feelings about children's home and community environments. Also, you can discuss your own experiences working with children who exhibit behaviors similar to the ones in the examples.

B. How Children Develop Self-Esteem (10 minutes)

This discussion focuses on the importance of self-esteem for sound development and learning. During this discussion you can offer examples from your own experiences of how children develop self-esteem.

C. Helping Children Learn to Trust (10 minutes)

Participants discuss how children begin developing trust as they learn to rely on an adult such as a parent, caretaker, or teacher. Their feelings of trust grow as they develop friendships with other children.

D. Helping Children Develop Autonomy (10 minutes)

Children who are affected by high levels of stress may have had few opportunities to develop self-help skills, or, conversely, they may have been forced to do too much for themselves, with few opportunities to play. In either case, classroom teams can help children develop autonomy.

E. Helping Children Develop In Other Domains (10 minutes)

The group will review and discuss strategies for helping children develop cognitive and physical skills. You can share examples from your own experiences with children.

F. Conducting Observations to Get to Know Individual Children (30 minutes)

This training segment begins by reviewing the purposes of observation and suggested strategies for recording observation notes. With your classroom team think of a child you would like to know more about. Next, record what you already know about the child on *Handout 3: Getting to Know an Individual Child.* Then meet with your team to discuss the similarities and differences in your recordings.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Each person will share something learned during this session that can be used next week with children.
- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 3-1: Encouraging a Child's Development* and/or *3-2: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 2)* before your next meeting. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.
- The group will agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Reading 3: Characteristics of Children Living in Multistressed Environments

The Effects of Multistressed Environments

As children grow and mature—gain self-esteem, develop social skills, use a variety of cognitive abilities, practice newly acquired fine and gross motor skills—they are challenged. This challenge creates stress—the kind that we normally think of as healthy. In addition to these normal and healthy challenges, children who live in multistressed environments often must cope with hunger, extreme poverty, homelessness, or violence. They need help from classroom teams to learn ways to cope with these unrelenting sources of stress.

How might children be affected by living in a multistressed environment?

The following are examples of how children who are highly stressed might be affected.

- Some children may not have received the nurturing needed to develop a sense of trust. In the words of Lisbeth Schorr, "Both common sense and research tell us that as family stress, *regardless of its source,* increases, the capacity for nurturing decreases, and the likelihood of abuse and neglect increases."[1] When parents are overwhelmed by the stresses of daily life, they may not be able to respond to their young children's needs consistently, predictably, and thoughtfully. Instead, children may get the message that they are not valued. They may see themselves as being in the way, a nuisance, or even a burden.

- Children may have grown up in an environment that was so unsafe that they were not allowed to use their senses to explore. For example, when a family lives in substandard, hazardous housing, it may be necessary for an infant or toddler to spend much of the day in a crib, stroller, high chair, or other confining equipment, rather than being free to move and crawl around. Such lack of freedom can inhibit or slow down development.

- Families may not provide consistent, age-appropriate guidance to help their children develop self-discipline. Discipline may be sporadic, overly punitive, and/or applied without regard for the child's developmental age. For example, one day children may be punished for talking back to parents, while on another day this same behavior is ignored. Lack of consistency can make it difficult for children to develop trust.

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[1] Schorr, Lisbeth B. and Daniel Schorr, *Within Our Reach, Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 151.

- Families may live in overcrowded homes, with little private space. Homeless children in particular have intense needs for privacy and individual space, and may have difficulty sharing materials in the classroom and their teacher's attention.

- Children growing up in overcrowded or unsafe homes, or children who have moved frequently, may have had no place to play and few opportunities to develop friendships.

- Families may have little control over their lives, and the children may have had few opportunities to learn how to make decisions and choices. This lack of control can be communicated to the children in the family both directly and indirectly. For example, in many homeless shelters meals are served at specific times, and food is not available in between meals. If a family misses the meal time (perhaps because the bus was late, or the alarm clock didn't go off) children are likely to be hungry until the next meal. This is one reason why children may be so hungry when they arrive at Head Start that they do not participate in the activities.

What are some classroom behaviors that might be exhibited by a child who is living in a multistressed environment?

Young children can display a wide range of signs that their lives are full of stress. The behaviors described in the examples might be due to a variety of stresses including: exposure to violence, child abuse or neglect, homelessness, and so on. Children do not respond to stress in the same ways that adults do. They may develop coping mechanisms that make it difficult to play and make friends with other children. Regardless of the cause of the stress, what children need most is a safe, supportive environment, including caring adults. They need many opportunities to play because play helps them cope with stress and develop friendships. In addition, some children may need additional services from specialists such as a speech therapist, psychologist, or physician.

As you review the examples that follow you may think, "These sound like typical children, not children who are affected by stress." Typical children may behave in these ways occasionally, however, a **highly stressed child is likely to exhibit several of these behaviors, day after day, for long periods of time.**

The examples show the response of one member of the classroom team. The individual would discuss the child's behavior and strategies for responding with the classroom team and with component staff such as the Disabilities Coordinator or the Mental Health Consultant .

A child who is living in a multistressed environment might exhibit behaviors such as the following:

- **Developmental differences**
    - Developmental delays, especially in language, fine and gross motor, and social skills.
      When four-year-old Bryce's teacher observes him trying to cut a piece of paper for a collage, she realizes that he isn't ready to use scissors. She shows him how to tear paper so he can make a collage. He never used scissors before coming to Head Start. So he needs time to develop his fine motor skills.
    - Developmental lags or regression to previous stages.
      Some days Francie likes to lie in the corner with her legs curled up, sucking her thumb. Her teacher sits with her and rubs her back, reassuring her that she is in a safe place.
- **Family relationships**
    - Strong bonds with siblings and/or takes care of younger siblings.
      Although Katie and Derek are in separate classrooms, they always look for each other during outdoor play time. Their teachers plan activities that the children can do together as well as those that involve other children.
    - Frequent, repeated ambivalent and avoidance behavior towards mothers.
      In the morning Geneva won't say good-bye to her mother and at pick-up time she cries and says she doesn't want to go home. Her teacher helps her to reconnect with her mother at the end of the day and talks to her about her mother during the day.
- **The daily program, routines, and transitions**
    - Sleep problems, including difficulty falling asleep and waking up, and nightmares.
      Most days Helena has a hard time falling asleep. She tosses and turns and stares at the ceiling. Her teacher rubs her back to help her fall asleep.
    - Too tired to participate in activities.
      Anna put her head down on the table and quickly falls asleep. Her teacher set sup a cot near the book corner so Anna can take a nap.

- Difficulty using utensils (forks, knives, spoons)
  Darnell is used to eating with his hands.. It seems that he doesn't know how to use utensils. His teacher sits with him at mealtimes to help him learn how to use his spoon and fork. She offers encouragement without criticizing or forcing him to use utensils.

- Short attention span, quickly moving from one activity to another.
  During the last ten minutes, Demia played with the blocks, climbed up to the loft and down again, walked around in the firefighter's hat, and used the baster at the water play table. His teacher will show him how to use some of the materials in the classroom and sit with him while he plays.

- **Mental health**

  - Moods change quickly and without notice.
    As the children and adults walked outside to the playground, Marie noticed that her shoe was untied and started screaming. Her teacher quickly responded, tied Marie's shoe, and sat with her quietly for a few minutes until she calmed down.

  - Unable to relax.
    Eddie stands by his cubby watching the other children. His teacher asks him if he would like to play with playdough. The teacher plays with Eddie for a few minutes, rolling the dough and using the different utensils.

  - Appears to lack self-esteem; doesn't want to try new tasks; seems to be afraid of failing.
    A teacher offers Kim a turn with a new game. Kim says, "No. I want to do the old one." The teacher offers to play the old game with Kim first, then they can try the new one.

  - Seeks attention and physical contact indiscriminately.
    When a visitor comes to the classroom, Jon runs to her and asks to be picked up. His teacher offers to sit and read a book with Jon.

  - Clings to people and possessions.
    Several times this week, Eric refused to take off his coat and stayed close to his teacher all day. His teacher took a Polaroid® picture of him, hung it over his cubby, and told Eric that the cubby was his own special place.

- **Interactions with other children**
  - Intrudes in other children's play.
    Two children are pushing cars up and down a bridge they made with blocks. Mark grabs several cars and takes them to a nearby table. When the other children try to get them back, Mark throws the cars across the room. The teacher takes Mark aside and tells him that it is not okay to throw things. She helps him find something else to do.

  - Has trouble reading social cues from peers.
    Rudy is sitting on her carpet square. Nancy tries to sit on the same square. Rudy gets up and moves to another square. The teacher steps in and asks Rudy to use her words to let Nancy know that she doesn't want her to sit so close. She tells Nancy that there are enough carpet squares for each child to have his or her own.

  - Has difficulty playing and negotiating with peers.
    Three children are playing "beauty parlor." Lani tries to join in, but the children tell her to go away. The teacher gives Lani an old hair dryer and offers to sit in the beauty parlor to have her hair done.

- **Behavior issues**
  - Acts out to seek attention.
    Luis knocks over his block tower and throws the blocks around the room. His teacher reminds him that blocks are for building with. She helps him clean up, then gets him involved in water play.

  - Displays aggressive behaviors.
    Amber refuses to go outside and kicks her teacher. The teacher asks Amber to come with her to the kitchen to get some ice for her sore leg. On the way she tells Amber that it is not okay to kick people. She says, "Use your words to tell me why you don't want to go outside."

  - Extremely withdrawn or quiet.
    Perry plays alone and rarely speaks to his teachers and classmates. His teacher spends time with him each day, to let Perry know that she cares about him.

How Children Develop Self-Esteem

Adults and children with self-esteem know what they are capable of doing and feel good about themselves. They know that they are respected and valued by others. Development of a sense of self begins in infancy and continues throughout life. It is determined and influenced by daily experiences and interactions with the important people in our lives.

Why is self-esteem so important?

Self-esteem affects children's ability to play, to relate to others, to grow, and to develop. When children have low self-esteem they may not like themselves, they frequently are unwilling to try new activities, and they may feel as though they aren't valued by others. Children express their negative feelings about themselves in a variety of ways, including being aggressive or very withdrawn.

How do children develop self-esteem?

Erik Erikson identified critical stages in the child's development of self-esteem. Three of these stages occur during early childhood. When development occurs at a normal pace, **trust** develops in infancy, **autonomy** in toddlerhood, and **initiative** during the preschool years.

Many children have not passed completely through the stages defined by Erikson. They will have residual needs from earlier stages still to be met.

How do infants develop a sense of trust?

Infants develop a sense of **trust** when the adults who care for them let them know that they are valued human beings. Infants develop a sense of trust when their parents and other caregivers:

- feed them when they are hungry;
- hold and feed them often, not just when they are crying;
- change them promptly after they are wet or soiled, and talk and play with them as they change their diapers;
- respond to their cries quickly and warmly;
- talk to them in caring and soft tones;
- provide a comfortable place to sleep when they are tired;
- give them interesting things to look at, listen to, and play with; and
- provide a safe environment so infants can move and use their senses to explore.

A sense of trust allows infants to explore the environment, try new activities, develop new skills, and learn how to interact with other children and adults.

Preschool-age children who have not developed a sense of trust might behave as follows:

- Sara follows Bonnie around the room all day. When Bonnie leaves an activity, Sara follows her to the next one. Sara doesn't talk to or play with Bonnie, she just wants to follow her around.

- Kim spends much of the day worrying about her belongings. Her teacher insists that she keep her backpack in her cubby, but several times a day Kim goes to the cubby to get it out. If she leaves her blanket at home, she is unable to sleep or participate in activities.

A sense of trust is essential to the development of **autonomy**, which generally occurs during toddlerhood.

How do toddlers develop a sense of autonomy?

A sense of autonomy allows toddlers to be independent, do things for themselves, make decisions, and explore the world. Their sense of trust (in their parents or other adults) allows them to feel safe enough to try new things. They may say "no" a lot, but this is a way to test limits, rather than intentional misbehavior. Toddlers are struggling with their conflicting needs to be cared for and to do things for themselves. Toddlers develop a sense of autonomy when their parents and other caregivers:

- help them learn how to control their own behavior;
- respond quickly and calmly to their cries;
- allow them to make decisions (what color socks to wear, an apple or a banana for snack);
- provide a safe environment for exploration;
- allow them to make mistakes when they are learning to do things for themselves (such as using the toilet); and
- continue providing lots of support, while at the same time allowing for toddlers' need to do things for themselves.

Preschool-age children who have not developed a sense of autonomy may be confused about their own abilities. They tend to lack confidence and have low self-esteem. Their behavior may go from one extreme to another. Such a child might behave as follows:

- Amy never asks for help with routines such as washing her hands or tying her shoes. At times she helps other children with their self-help routines. She won't try the new puzzles, however. She says that she knows they are too hard for her.

- Gerald's first reaction when asked, "Would you like to ...?" always is, "No." He does respond, however, when offered a choice such as, "Would you like to ride a tricycle or play on the swings."

A sense of autonomy is essential to the development of initiative, which generally occurs during the preschool years.

How do children develop initiative?

Initiative describes the active, talkative, and creative life of preschoolers. They develop initiative as they use their rapidly expanding social, physical, and cognitive skills to build, draw, mold, paint, climb, swing, and so on. Preschoolers develop a sense of initiative when their parents and other caregivers:

- listen patiently as children express their thoughts and feelings;
- provide many opportunities for learning through play;
- encourage them to do many things for themselves (dressing, washing face and hands, cleaning up, helping with chores, selecting what toys to use);
- give them many opportunities to solve problems, make decisions, and succeed and fail at tasks; and
- allow children to pursue their interests at their own pace without pushing them to learn academics such as arithmetic and reading.

Preschool age children who have not developed a sense of initiative have difficulty getting involved in the daily activities in the classroom. Such a child might behave as follows:

- Daniel is overwhelmed by all of the choices in the classroom. He usually spends just a few minutes in haphazard play in a learning center, being easily distracted by children near him. He quickly moves from one activity to the next without getting involved in using the toys and materials.

- Barbara plays with the playdough every day. She is most comfortable using the same props with the playdough. When offered new props she shows no interest in trying them.

Helping Children Learn to Trust

Children may not respond at first to your caring behaviors. They may be hostile, aggressive, or withdrawn. Over time the children learn that you can be trusted and may begin feeling secure enough to explore the environment, get involved in activities, and play with other children. When a once withdrawn child begins acting out, you may be frustrated and confused. In fact, the child is making progress. The child's newly developed sense of trust allows her to test the rules and boundaries of the classroom. Classroom teams need to continue supporting the child so she will learn that adults will continue to care for her even when she misbehaves.

There are many strategies classroom teams can use to help children learn to trust. Some examples appear below:

- **Let the child know in advance if the daily schedule is changed** for a special event (for example, a field trip) and make it clear that you will return to the regular schedule the next day. While taking advantage of "teachable moments," give extra attention to children who seem frustrated or confused by the change.
- **Help a child learn to trust by holding a hand** while he or she climbs the ladder to the slide, or by keeping a promise to push a child on a swing no higher than he or she wants to go.
- **Respond to a child's cries even when the child is crying to get attention.** A teacher's quick and consistent response will help the child learn that his or her needs are important and will be addressed.
- **Set up opportunities for children to cooperate with others.** Two children can carry equipment outdoors or set the table for lunch. Successful experiences working alongside other children will eventually lead to successful experiences playing together.
- **Provide many opportunities for dramatic play.** Suggest that the child be the baby. He or she will feel cared for as the other children provide blankets, bottles, and attention.

Helping Children Develop Autonomy

Children who have had few opportunities to do things for themselves need to learn self-help skills. Conversely, children who have been forced to develop too many skills too soon need to relax and explore their real interests and skills. Classroom teams can try the following suggestions for helping children develop autonomy:

- **Provide open-ended activities** that involve no beginning or end, and no right or wrong way to do them. For example, children can decide when to join in and leave sand and water play, and that there is no right or wrong way to play with these materials.

- **Provide opportunities for children to release tension.** Highly repetitive activities such as punching holes in paper, tearing paper, or squishing playdough can be very comforting. Blowing bubbles, sand and water play, painting, and scribbling also are opportunities to release pent-up feelings.

- **Show children what to do, to encourage development of self-help skills.** Children may not know how to hold utensils, set a table, squeeze toothpaste. A caring teacher can teach the child how to do the routine and do it with him or her until it is mastered. Teaching can be direct or through modeling, role playing, or dramatic play.

Helping Children Develop in Other Domains

Preschool children develop their cognitive abilities best in an environment in which they have made positive strides in developing trust, autonomy, and initiative. When children feel good about themselves and comfortable with their place in the world, they can:

- Ask and respond to questions;
- Observe, explore, experiment, and discover the world around them;
- Think of several solutions to a problem;
- Succeed often and handle failure;
- Assimilate and use new information;
- Complete tasks and projects in which they are interested;
- Discriminate between similar objects;
- Classify objects by physical characteristics and function;
- Create patterns and designs with various objects; and
- Use concepts of measurement.

Children who engage in these activities are developing cognitive abilities appropriate for their age—abilities that form the foundation for later literacy and numeracy.

Children who live in multistressed environments might spend a lot of time in homes or shelters that are too noisy, hectic, or crowded for them to engage in problem-solving activities such as puzzle play, looking through picture books, sorting collections of bottle caps, and so on.

Children who live in multistressed environments might receive their primary care from adults who do not have the time, energy, patience, or understanding to listen to and respond to children's questions, read to them, or encourage their problem solving skills.

Preschool children who feel safe, who have established an appropriate amount of independence, and who feel competent in initiating activities usually develop physical skills—all the gross and fine motor skills that they will have in their adult lives. They confidently use these skills, have dexterity and strength, and coordinate eye and hand (and other body part) movements. They also use all their senses to learn more about their world.

Children who live in multistressed environments may have had few opportunities to play outdoors where they can run, jump, climb and otherwise develop their gross motor skills. For some children, low self-esteem prevents them from attempting physical activities because they fear that they will fail.

How can classroom teams help children develop cognitive skills?

Classroom teams can try the following suggestions for helping children develop their cognitive abilities.

- **Spend 5-10 minutes every day with each child in need of special attention.** Use this one-on-one time to help him or her complete a project, to ask open-ended questions, and to praise the child's efforts and successes.
- **Invite children to use materials that promote exploration and problem solving.** Encourage collecting and sorting items such as rocks, pebbles, and buttons, guessing what will sink and float in water, creating a city with roads and buildings in the block corner.
- **Read to one or two children at a time, in addition to regular story time.** Each child can ask questions and talk about the book without having to share your attention.

How can classroom teams help children develop physical skills?

Classroom teams can help children develop physical skills by the following:

- **Make sure tired children are rested before outdoor play time.** Children need to have energy for climbing, running, throwing and catching balls, and other physical activities.

- **Offer activities that help children relax before active play.** When children feel calm they are more likely to attempt challenging physical skills, and they are more likely to be successful.

- **Help children learn how to use equipment.** Children may not have had opportunities to ride tricycles, use jump ropes, or play with balls.

Conducting Observations to Get to Know Individual Children

Through systematic, objective observations, classroom teams can get to know individual children and assess their skills and interests. Classroom teams should follow a schedule for regularly observing all children in the classroom. Brief (five to ten minutes) observations can take place daily as children participate in activities such as indoor and outdoor play, transitions, routines, arrival, and departure.

It is important to review observation notes frequently and use the information to plan for all children. Be sure to share your observations with classroom team members, component coordinators, and other specialists in a confidential and professional manner.

Why do classroom teams observe children?

Classroom teams observe children for a variety of reasons.[2]

- To **determine each child's interests, strengths, and needs**. "André stands near the door by himself when he arrives at the program. He may need some encouragement to get involved in an activity."

- To **measure each child's progress**. "Jasmine "cooked dinner" with another child in the house corner today. She usually plays alone."

- To **resolve particular problems** a child might have. "I reviewed the team's observation notes on Raoul. He seems to lose his temper on days when it's very cold outdoors. We need to make sure he participates in indoor gross motor activities when it's too cold for outdoor play."

- To **report children's progress** to parents and colleagues. "TaCori had a great day today. He climbed to the top of the slide by himself."

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[2] Adapted with permission from Diane Trister Dodge, Derry G. Koralek, and Peter Pizzolongo, *Caring for Preschool Children, Volume II* (Washington DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1991) pp. 295-296.

- To **evaluate the effects of the environment** and the program's activities. "Let's review our observations of this month's art activities so we can see what we might want to add to this area to respond to children's interests and to keep it challenging."

- To **plan a program** based on the interests, strengths, and needs of each child. "Mariah hasn't been able to do the 12 piece puzzles. We can put out some with fewer pieces and encourage her to try them."

What are some tips for recording observations?

Here are some suggestions for recording your observations.[3]

- Have a reason for observing each child, for example, to find out how this child participates in routines or how long this child stays involved in an activity. This will help you focus your observation.

- Include the following facts before you begin:
  - the child's name and age,
  - the date of the observation,
  - the setting (where the activity is taking place and who is involved—for example, "Ms. Jenkins and Bianca sit under the loft looking at books"), and
  - the observer's name.

- Write what you see and hear, not what you think is happening.

- Describe *how* a child is doing or saying something.

- Jot notes frequently. Carry a pad or index cards and pencil with you.

- Write in short phrases rather than complete sentences.

- Try to abbreviate and shorten what a child said—don't try to write all the words; summarize what was said.

- Develop a system of abbreviations or initials for materials and equipment; for instance, for different areas use ar-art, bl-blocks, sb-sandbox and so on.

- Use arrows to indicate movement.

- Make diagrams of the environment showing the child in relation to the setting, other children, and adults.

- Underline words to indicate a particular intensity (for instance, "said loudly").

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[3] Adapted from materials developed by the Head Start Resource and Training Center (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1975).

Handout 3: Getting to Know an Individual Child

With your classroom team, think of a child you would like to know more about. Record on this observation summary what you already know about the child. Then, discuss with your classroom team the information each of you recorded about the child. Are your responses similar or very different? What can you learn from each other about this child? You will also use this observation summary in a follow-up activity.

Observation Summary

Child: ______________________ **Date:** ______________________

Socio-Emotional Development

Self-help skills (toileting, dressing, using utensils, brushing teeth, combing hair, participating in clean up and other classroom chores)

What can this child do alone? ______________________

____

What can this child do with adult assistance? ______________________

____

What does this child need to learn to do? ______________________

____

What else can this child do? ______________________

____

Interactions with other children

How does this child play with others—along side, with one or two , or in small groups? ______________________

____

Does he or she suggest the play, or join in existing activities? ______________________

____

How does the child handle disagreements? ______________________

____

Can the child identify and express him or herself in socially acceptable ways?

____

How else does this child interact with children? ______________________

____

Interactions with adults

How and when does this child ask for help? ______________________________

____

How does this child identify and express needs and feelings? ______________

____

How does this child respond to requests? ________________________________

____

How does this child seek comfort when worried or afraid? _________________

____

How does this child share the teacher's time and attention with other children?

____

____

How else does this child interact with adults? ____________________________

____

Self-esteem

How does this child approach new materials or situations? _______________

____

What does the child do when a new person comes in the room—seek attention or continue to play? ____

____

Does the child usually seek independence or want to be cared for? _________

____

Does the child choose an activity or toy to play with? _____________________

____

How does the child talk about him or herself? ____________________________

____

Does the child stick to a new task until he or she masters it, or give up after a few tries? ____

____

Cognitive Development

Language skills

Does this child speak in sentences?

Does this child speak clearly and can he or she be understood?

Does this child talk about feelings, needs, ideas, and opinions?

Can this child listen to a story?

Does this child follow directions?

What else can this child do?

Understanding concepts

Is this child aware of the daily schedule?

Does this child show interest in cause and effect?

Is he or she curious about how things work or what goes on in the environment?

Can this child solve problems in his or her head or think before acting?

How does this child use materials?

Does this child ask questions?

Does this child notice how things are alike and different?

Does this child use classification skills?

What else can this child do?

Physical Development

Gross motor skills

Can this child run, jump, climb, hop, and so on? ____________________

____

Can this child pull a wagon? ____________________

____

Can this child ride a tricycle? ____________________

____

Can this child throw and catch a ball? ____________________

____

What else can this child do? ____________________

____

Fine motor skills

Can this child turn the pages in a book? ____________________

____

Can this child use crayons or hold a paint brush? ____________________

____

Can this child roll playdough, put together Legos® or other manipulatives?

____

What else can this child do? ____________________

____

Uniqueness

What makes this child special?

What does he or she like to do?

What makes the child laugh, cry, be frustrated, act out?

How does the child respond to the different members of the classroom team?

How would you characterize the child's usual temperament—easygoing, assertive, placid, high energy?

What else makes this child unique?

Ability to Cope With Stress

How does this child respond when asked to clean up before he or she is ready?

Does this child spend much of the day alone or rocking back and forth?

Does this child become frustrated or angry when there are minor distractions?

What else does this child do to cope with stress?

You can include the team's completed observation summaries in this child's file. You might want to use observation summaries to get to know all the children in your class.

Follow-Up Activity 3-1: Encouraging a Child's Development

As a classroom team, think of a child who needs help developing trust, autonomy, and/or cognitive and physical skills. Each of you will keep a daily log of the times you step in to provide extra support for this child.

The examples below are followed by a blank daily log. Record the child's name, the area of development on which you will focus, your actions, and the child's responses. If you prefer, you can use a daily log of your own design. At the end of each day compare your notes and discuss the child's response to the team's support.

Examples

What You Did	Child's Response
Developing Trust *I noticed Jill sitting by herself, sucking her thumb. I asked her to help Michael set the table for lunch.*	*Jill said she didn't know how to set the table. Michael and I showed her how. Later I saw her playing next to Michael at the water table.*
Developing Autonomy *Terry was having trouble getting his coat on. I showed him how to lay his coat on the floor and flip it over, and then put it on.*	*When Terry's mom came to pick him up he showed her that he could put his coat on without any help.*
Developing Cognitive and/or Physical Skills *Ramon was playing with some cups and bottles at the water table. He picked up the baster but wasn't able to make it fill up with water. I picked up another baster and used it to fill several containers.*	*Ramon watched intently. He tried it himself and was successful. He used the baster to fill up all the cups.*

Daily Log

Child: ______________________ **Date:** ______________________

Focus: ____

What You Did	Child's Response
Day One	
Day Two	

What You Did	Child's Response
Day Three	
Day Four	
Day Five	

Follow-Up Activity 3-2: Getting to Know an Individual Child (Part 2)

During the next week continue learning about the child on whom you focused in this session. Observe the child at different times of the day and while engaged in different activities. Complete as much of *Handout 3: Getting to Know an Individual Child* as possible to summarize what you have learned about the child.

Discuss your observations and summary with your classroom team members. How can you help this child learn appropriate coping mechanisms? What else would you like to know about this child?

Session 4
The Learning Environment

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Create a supportive Head Start environment for children who might be experiencing high levels of stress.
- Adapt the environment to provide appropriate levels of interest and challenge for all children.

Materials

- *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs*
- Reading
  4: The Learning Environment
- Handout
  4: Adapting the Environment (Part 1)
- Follow-Up Activities
  4-1: Adapting the Environment (Part 2)
  4-2: Assessing the Environment
  4-3: The Daily Schedule

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 3 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 3 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- There are many different ways classroom teams can help children develop trust and autonomy, and promote cognitive and physical development.
- Development is a gradual process and it takes a long time for some children to progress to the next stage.
- Classroom teams need to observe carefully to see children's growing sense of trust and autonomy, and their growing cognitive and physical skills.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Supportive Head Start Environments (1 hour)

As you participate in this discussion, think about ways you may need to adapt your environment to meet the needs of all of the children in your group. It is important to remember that developmentally appropriate programs are individualized to respond to all children's skills, needs, and interests. The suggestions in the reading and the *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs* may be appropriate for your classroom.

B. Changing the Environment to Meet a Child's Needs (45 minutes)

Handout 4: Adapting the Environment (Part 1), is used for this activity. With your classroom team, you will focus on one area of the environment—for example, blocks, outdoors, dramatic play, library, sand and water—and list the toys, materials, and equipment found there.

Next, your team will think of a child in the room who needs help to get positively involved in this area. Your team will discuss what this child might need to benefit from this area and develop a plan for helping the child to use the area.

When you have completed your plan, you will share your ideas with your trainer and other classroom teams.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Each person will share something learned during this session that they can use next week with the children.

- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 4-1: Adapting the Environment (Part 2)* and/or *4-2: Adapting the Environment* before your next meeting. Everyone should complete *4-3: The Daily Schedule,* which will be used in Session 5. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

- The group will agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Reading 4: The Learning Environment

Developmentally Appropriate Environments

Children who experience high levels of stress in their lives have the same needs for a developmentally appropriate environment as other children. That is, the classroom should follow the same principles for encouraging children's healthy growth and development:

- The environment is physically and emotionally safe and predictable.
- Children have many opportunities to learn by doing. Through play and small group experiences they explore, develop and practice skills, problem solve, and make decisions.
- Children's interests, needs, and developing skills are reflected through individualized activities, materials, and adult interactions. The environment provides new challenges to encourage growth and development.
- The environment, curriculum, and classroom team reflect Head Start's multicultural principles. "Children are encouraged to develop an awareness of, respect for, and appreciation of individual cultural differences."
- The classroom team's expectations for children's behavior are based on knowledge of child development and of individual children.
- Classroom team members interact with children in ways that foster trust, self-esteem, curiosity, and independence and acknowledge each child's unique temperament and personality.
- The classroom team welcomes parents to the classroom. Parents are respected and encouraged to be actively involved in the program.

Environments That Help Children Feel Secure

In addition, children who are highly stressed can benefit from a "therapeutic" setting that provides a refuge from their chaotic worlds—a place that is safe, predictable, and consistent. Certainly, this is true of all appropriate environments for preschool children, however, for some children it should be a major focus. Nurturing classroom team members are an important part of the environment. They help children feel secure by treating them with respect and letting them know that they will be safe. An environment that helps reduce stress includes the following elements.

Personal Spaces Where Children Can Be Alone for a While

Why is this important? Most preschoolers need to get away from the group at times, so all classrooms should include private areas. Children who live in multistressed environments may reside in overcrowded homes where there are few places to take a break from other people. They can benefit from being able to control inputs from the outside world by being in a place where they can withdraw physically and psychologically. Personal spaces allow children to develop self-regulation skills. A child can withdraw from the group to regain control of her emotions and actions. This may prevent the child from completely losing control and acting out in aggressive or other inappropriate ways.

How can Head Start provide this? Personal spaces can be a large cardboard carton, a pile of soft pillows in a corner, a small desk or table with room for only one child, or a sheet draped over three sides of a table. Some classrooms may need to set up several personal spaces. Some personal spaces can be part of the permanent room arrangement; others can be set up temporarily as the need arises.

Personal Belongings and Places to Store Them

Why is this important? Children who live in multistressed environments may have few possessions. They may not yet have developed a sense of ownership and are not ready to share. Children may also want privacy for using the bathroom, washing up, or other personal hygiene activities.

How can Head Start provide this? Most classrooms have private cubbies where children can safely store their possessions. Other ways to create a sense of ownership include providing new individual boxes of markers and crayons, decorating cubbies with photographs of children and their families, making individual place mats for mealtimes, assigning individual floor mats for each child to use at circle time or in the reading area, designating a special place on the wall for hanging each child's art work, and decorating shoe boxes for each child to store "prized possessions."

Home-like Materials

Why is this important? A home-like atmosphere is generally associated with programs for infants and toddlers because it supports the development of trust and autonomy. A home-like atmosphere can help children feel secure, which tends to enable children to take part in the program's activities.

How can Head Start provide this? Classroom teams can include items that reflect a variety of cultural backgrounds, including those of the children in the group. They can add home-like items such as pillows, curtains, kitchen utensils, a couch or overstuffed chair, tablecloths, plants, flowers, soft lighting from lamps rather than overhead fluorescent lights, and mirrors. Classroom teams can take photographs of children and families if a Polaroid® camera is available.

Creating a home-like environment includes providing dramatic play props that mirror children's lives. Props might include old suitcases and tote bags, brown paper bags, winter coats, and sleeping bags or quilts that snap together. Classroom teams can make "mental notes" during home visits and then gather appropriate props.

Limited, Simple Wall Decorations

Why is this important? Children can be overwhelmed by too much visual stimulation. When the walls are cluttered it is difficult to separate one item from another.

How can Head Start provide this? Classroom teams can evaluate what they are hanging on their walls and bulletin boards to determine what items should remain. They can include items that are developmentally appropriate and of interest to the children and leave plenty of space between items so that the walls are not cluttered. One section of the wall can be used for a "rotating" art exhibit, hung at children's eye level.

Soft Music Rather Than Loud

Why is this important? Multistressed environments often are very noisy. Soft music, played at intervals during the day, can be soothing and relaxing. When background noise is too loud or when music is played constantly, children may "tune it out" and often can't pay attention to human voices.

How can Head Start provide this? Encourage children to select the music they would like to listen to and when. They can use sturdy, inexpensive "walkmen" with ear phones as well as tape or record players with speakers.

Space for Indoor and Outdoor Gross Motor Activities

Why is this important? Some children live in homes and neighborhoods where there are few opportunities to develop physical skills. Active play releases tension, enhances children's self-esteem, and promotes physical development.

How can Head Start provide this? Gross motor activities are an important part of any preschool program. Ideally, children play outdoors twice a day. During extremely inclement weather, programs can provide indoor gross motor activities in the classroom or in other parts of the building. Be sure that all children who need to or want to participate have an opportunity.

- Hallways are perfect for riding tricycles, rolling balls, tossing bean bags into baskets, relay games, building with large blocks, marching to music, and bowling (use plastic milk containers as pins). Consider this like any other interest area, limited to several children at a time.

- A loft in the classroom can provide many opportunities for physical play. Children can climb up and down stairs or a rope ladder, slide down a pole, swing (these can be hung on hooks when not in use), or jump off a low platform.

- Move aside furniture to make room for music and movement activities. Put down mats for tumbling. Lead the group in aerobics, exercises, and cooperative games using props such as hula hoops, streamers, parachutes, and large balls.

- Offer music and movement activities to encourage children to express their feelings: walk in an angry way, move in a shy way, jump in an excited way. Encourage children to move to the music in the way that they now feel and suggest other movements.

Materials That Allow Children to Make Simple, But Limited, Choices

Why is this important? Children who live in multistressed environments can be overwhelmed by the quantity and variety of materials present in a typical preschool room. They may have had little experience playing with toys and other materials.

How can Head Start provide this? Offer a large amount of one kind of material (e.g., a container of large beads and laces) rather than a wide variety of options (several kinds of beads, Legos®, sewing cards, table blocks, and pegboards). Classrooms that include children who are highly stressed need to meet a wide range of needs. While some children need limited choices, others need a variety. Here are examples of how to adapt the environment to provide both limited and varied choices:

- Divide the shelves in the table toy area in half. On one side provide several dishpans full of the large size of Legos®. On the other side provide several containers, each containing a different kind of manipulative. Help children choose the materials that are most appropriate for their stage of development.

- Set up the water table with a wide variety of props. Nearby, set up on a table individual dishpans full of water with one or two bottles or cups.
- Set up the sand table with a wide variety of props. Nearby, set up on a table individual trays of sand (the sand can be used again) with large bottle caps (such as 2-liter soda or detergent bottle caps). Some children are soothed by repetitive play experiences such as scooping up sand in the bottle cap, dumping it in the tray, then scooping up sand again.
- Set up the easels with two colors of paint. Let children know that additional colors are available.
- Provide individual sand trays (large aluminum roasting pans work well) and a variety of props (small animals, human figures, houses, trees, and other familiar items). Children can use the props to create "stories" that allow them to express their feelings.
- Set up the dramatic play area with a few housekeeping props (telephone, toaster, baseball caps) relevant to most children's experiences. Nearby, where children can reach them, store prop boxes containing materials to expand dramatic play. Use clear containers or plastic mesh baskets so children can easily see what is in the prop boxes.
- Divide the library area so that one part includes books with words and complex pictures. In the other part include picture books with only a few words such as *Goodnight Moon* or *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.*

Open-Ended Materials

Why is this important? There is no right or wrong way to use materials such as sand, water, playdough, paint, blocks, and dramatic play props. They are used in a variety of ways by children at different developmental levels. They will remain appropriate as children develop new skills.

How can Head Start provide this? Sand, water, playdough, paint, blocks, and dramatic play props are included in most preschool rooms. Providing a variety of props from very simple (measuring cups) to more complex (pumps and plastic tubing), will allow children at different developmental levels to be interested and challenged.

Toys and Materials That Are Appropriate for Younger Children

Why is this important? Because they have not been exposed to them, some children may not know how to use the materials typically found in preschool classrooms. They need to have success with simple toys and materials that will prepare them for exploring the more complicated items in the classroom.

How can Head Start provide this? "Toddler" items (e.g., puzzles with 3 to 8 large pieces, peg boards with large holes and large pegs, and push and pull toys) can be included in the interest areas along with items that are more challenging. Children are likely to gravitate towards the items that they find challenging, but not frustrating.

Be sure to observe children to have a clear idea of what new skills they are developing. As children make progress, classroom teams can provide more challenging materials.

Materials That Allow Children to ExpressTheir Feelings, Frustrations, and Fears, and Release Tension

Why is this important? Children may have feelings that they may not be able to express through words. Most preschool children need some outlets for strong feelings from time to time. Materials for self-expression are a part of most classrooms. Classrooms that serve children who are affected by multistressed environments need more of these.

How can Head Start provide this? Sand and water play, paper for tearing, playdough, fingerpaint, shaving cream, are excellent vehicles for self-expression. In addition, provide a variety of children's books that address real-life situations and feelings.

Consistent ElementsThat Do Not Change

Why is this important? Children living in multistressed environments can learn to trust in the program. A classroom that is generally the same today as it was yesterday helps them feel in control, safe, and nurtured.

How can Head Start provide this? For some children, changes in the environment are interesting and stimulating. Classroom teams can make these changes, while leaving other elements in place. For example, after a field trip to the zoo, a teacher might set up a second dramatic play area with "zoo" props but leave the housekeeping area unchanged.

Handout 4: Adapting the Environment (Part 1)

With your classroom team, focus on one area of the environment—for example, blocks, outdoors, dramatic play, library, sand and water—and list the toys and materials in this area.

Toys, materials, and equipment in the ________ area of the environment:

Next, think of a child who has a hard time playing in this area. The child might be one who is withdrawn and seldom gets involved with the materials and activities. Or, the child might have a short attention span, be very disruptive, or be overwhelmed by the area. As a team, discuss what this child needs to benefit from this area and answer the following questions.

Child: ____________________ **Date:** ____________________

Describe the problems this child has in using this area:

What can you add to this area to help the child play there?

What can you remove from this area to help the child play there?

How could you change the display of materials?

How could you rearrange the area to help the child play there?

What can you do or say to help this child use this area?

Remember, changes should be made gradually, over time, so that children won't be overwhelmed by too many changes at once.

Follow-Up Activity 4-1: Adapting the Environment (Part 2)

In this session you developed plans for making one area of the room more appropriate for one of the children in your group. During the next week implement the plan and encourage the child to get involved in this area. Take notes on how the child uses the new materials.

Child: ____________________ **Date:** ____________________

Area to be Adapted: ____________________

Toys and materials added to the area to encourage this child to play there:

How this area was rearranged to encourage this child to play there:

How the child responded to these changes: ____________________

Follow-Up Activity 4-2: Assessing the Environment

Use this form to assess how well your environment meets children's needs. Review the assessment results and plan ways you can adapt or change the environment. Try out some of your ideas before the next session.

Personal Spaces Where Children Can Be Alone for a While

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Personal Belongings and Space to Store Them

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Home-like Materials

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Limited, Simple Wall Decorations

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Soft Music

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Space for Indoor Gross Motor Activities

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Space for Outdoor Gross Motor Activities

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Materials That Allow Children to Make Simple, But Limited, Choices

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Open-ended Materials

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Toys and Materials that are Appropriate for Younger Children

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Materials that Allow Children to Express Themselves and Release Tension

What We Provide Now	Changes We Would Like to Make

Consistent Elements that Do Not Change

What We Provide Now	**Changes We Would Like to Make**

Remember, changes should be made gradually, over time, so that children won't be overwhelmed by too many changes at once.

Follow-Up Activity 4-3: The Daily Schedule

With your classroom team, record your daily schedule on a large piece of paper. You will use this in the next session.

Session 5

The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Develop and follow a balanced schedule with consistent routines and well-planned transitions.
- Adapt the daily schedule and transitions to meet the special needs of children who are highly stressed.

Materials

- Daily schedules on flip chart paper (Session 4 Follow-Up Activity)
- Reading
  5: The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions
- Handouts
  5-1: Handling Routines and Transitions
  5-2: Suggestions for Handling Routines and Transitions
- Follow-Up Activities
  5-1: Adapting the Schedule
  5-2: Adapting Routines and Transitions

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 4 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 4 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- With careful planning, the environment can address a wide range of interests, skills, and needs.
- Changes in the environment should be made gradually so children won't be confused or overwhelmed.

You can ask questions and/or voice concerns before the session begins.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Handling Disruptions in Our Lives (15 minutes)

Participants think about a time during the past week when their schedule, routines, or transitions were disrupted. Write down what happened, how you felt, and how you handled it. Your trainer will ask for volunteers to share their responses. These will be recorded on a flip chart.

Next, participants will share examples of how different children might respond when their home or classroom schedules, routines, or transitions are disrupted.

B. The Daily Schedule (20 minutes)

The group will review the purpose of the daily schedule and characteristics of a well-planned schedule that supports children. You will discuss why large group activities can be particularly stressful for some children. What happens in your classroom when children are gathered in a large group? Does your daily schedule allow children to be in small groups for most of the day?

Next, classroom teams will share with the group their own daily schedules—recorded on flip chart paper for a Session 4 Follow-Up Assignment. Each team will discuss the following:

- what takes place during the day;
- how the schedule includes the characteristics described above;
- how the schedule helps children develop a sense of security;
- what happens when you change the schedule to take advantage of special events, "teachable moments," or emergencies;
- how you help children understand the order of daily events; and
- how the schedule provides opportunities for using and developing skills.

C. Routines (20 minutes)

The group will discuss what children gain from participating in routines and why it is important to handle them thoughtfully. Your trainer will lead you in brainstorming to suggest what classroom teams can do to help children during routines. There are additional ideas in the reading.

D. Transitions (20 minutes)

Children who live in multistressed environments may need extra attention during transitions from one activity to the next. Your trainer will lead you in brainstorming to suggest what classroom teams can do to help children during transitions. There are additional ideas in the reading.

E. Handling Routines and Transitions (30 minutes)

Handout 5-1: *Handling Routines and Transitions* describes 6 situations in which children are having difficulty handling transitions. You will work in small groups (3 or 6, depending on how many participants are in attendance). Each group will address 1 or 2 situations. Small groups will read and discuss the situations and develop strategies to help the children.

Handout 5-2: Suggestions for Handling Routines and Transitions includes some suggested strategies. These may repeat or be in addition to the strategies developed by the small groups. The group will review the new suggestions and determine whether they could be used in your program.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Based on what they learned in this session, participants will be asked to share something they plan to do differently in their classroom schedule, routine, or transitions.
- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 5-1: Adapting the Schedule* and/or *5-2: Adapting Routines and Transitions* before you meet again. They will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.
- The group will agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Reading 5: The Daily Schedule, Routines, and Transitions

Handling Disruptions

Has something ever happened that disrupted your schedule, a routine, or a transition?

- You were in the middle of a project at home when your six-year-old interrupted you and asked for help.
- You missed the bus and were late for work—again.
- The refrigerator broke down the day after you bought a lot of groceries.
- A training workshop began half an hour later than scheduled.
- You were eating lunch with the children when a child wet his or her pants.
- Your car broke down.

How did you feel?

- Angry
- Frustrated
- Foolish
- Overwhelmed
- Scared

How did you handle it?

- Asked for help.
- Rearranged my schedule.
- Planned to make changes in my routines.
- Took a deep breath and did what needed to be done.

How do children handle disruption?

How might a child respond when he or she:

- Can't find a special blanket at nap time.
- Learns that the daily schedule has been changed so the group can go outside to watch construction workers dig a hole.
- Arrives at the program late and finds the other children busy at play.
- Wakes up before getting enough sleep.
- Is very involved in an activity and is asked to stop to clean up.
- Is picked up earlier or later than usual.
- Learns that he or she is leaving the program at the end of the week.
- Moves to a new home.

Disruptions to the daily schedule, routines, and transitions can be very disturbing for children who live in multistressed environments. They tend to need a great deal of consistency and predictability in their lives. It is important to understand these needs and anticipate and plan for the times when children may have difficulty coping with changes in the day's events.

The Daily Schedule

The daily schedule states the sequence of the day's activities and tells when they will occur and for how long. When the schedule is very predictable and consistent, children tend to feel more secure. The schedule should be posted on the wall or bulletin board where parents, staff, and children can see it.

The following are characteristics of a well-planned schedule. These elements support all children; however, they are particularly important for children who live in multistressed environments.

- The day is **balanced** between:
    - Active and quiet times;
    - Large group, small group, and individual activities;
    - Child-initiated and adult-directed activities; and
    - Indoor and outdoor play.
- There is **sufficient time for transitions** so children don't have to hurry.
- There is **a long block of time for free play** when children can choose their own activities and pursue their own interests.
- **Outdoor play** is planned for at least 45 minutes. Programs operating for four or more hours have outdoor play twice a day.
- Children spend **very little time in large group activities**.
    - Many children are not ready for large group activities such as circle time. When faced with highly structured, adult-directed activities they may become frustrated and cope by acting out or becoming withdrawn.

    - Some children may not have the social skills for even small group experiences. At first, they will be most successful playing alone. Adults can help by providing materials and activities designed for use by two children. This will help a child learn to make a friend. When children have had many opportunities to relate to and play with another child, to share a little and talk about how they feel, they will be more ready to play with a group of three or four children.

How can you help children understand the daily schedule?

A pictorial representation of the schedule helps children actually see the order of daily events. This can be done using drawings or photographs. For example, a series of photographs could show children arriving in the morning, playing at the interest centers, getting ready to go outdoors, playing outside, and so on. This can be particularly helpful for children who have very little consistency in their lives and do not have a sense of control over what takes place. When they first enter the program, children might need reminders of what happens during the day. For example, "During free play we usually stay indoors. We'll go outside after snack." Children will feel empowered when they can state with accuracy what will take place next, "First I eat lunch. Then I brush my teeth."

While allowing for individual differences among children, the daily schedule should incorporate many opportunities for children to develop skills such as these:

- **Language skills** that develop whenever children talk with each other and with adults, and when adults talk to children about what they are doing. For example, children use their language skills during dramatic play, water and sand play, art experiences, block play, and music and movement activities.

- **Physical skills** that develop as children use manipulatives and art materials, climb to the top of the loft, jump in a pile of pillows, ride a tricycle, pull a wagon, build with blocks, and play catch with a friend or teacher.

- **Social skills** that grow as children spend the day interacting with others. They learn to make friends, negotiate, handle disagreements, and feel and express empathy for others. Classroom teams can help children develop social skills by asking two children to help each other, inviting a child to enter a dramatic play theme, or modeling social skills by joining in children's play.

- **Cognitive skills** that develop as children explore the materials in the water table to see what floats or sinks, build a complex block structure, combine paint colors at the easel, and figure out a way to take turns carrying a favorite pocketbook.

- **Self-help skills** that grow as children put on and take off dress-up clothes, set the table in the house corner, and select and put away toys.

- **Coping skills** that develop as children learn to deal with frustration when a puzzle piece won't fit or another child took the last empty swing.

Routines[1]

Routines are the activities that take place every day such as snack, lunch, going to the bathroom, brushing teeth, and so on. Children feel secure when routines are performed in the same way each day. For example, as children finish lunch they go to the sink to brush their teeth and wash their hands, then get their blankets from their cubbies and go to their cots. Rituals and routines provide continuity and reliability. Over time, these strategies strengthen a child's self-control and sense of mastery over the environment.

Predictable, consistent routines are especially important for children who live in multistressed environments for the following reasons:

- **Consistent routines reassure children**. Children who experience a lot of stress may be worried about many things in their lives. For example, they are comforted by knowing that every day lunch will be served family-style so they can serve themselves.
- **Predictable routines build a sense of trust and security**.
  Children who live in chaotic environments may not have consistency in their home routines. One night it may be easy to fall asleep; another night noise from the street or the next room may keep a child awake.

How can classroom teams help children during routines?

Classroom teams can try the following suggestions to help children during routines:

- **Encourage children to serve themselves**; however, be alert so that hungry children do not put too much on their plates (leaving little for the others in the group). Say, "You can put one spoonful on your plate now. If you are still hungry when you finish that spoonful you can serve yourself another one."
- **Reassure children that there is plenty of food at the program** and they will not have to be hungry later. If children hoard food, putting it in their pockets or hiding it in their cubbies, tell them they don't have to do this because they can have a snack whenever they are hungry.
- **Provide extra attention at rest time.** Rub children's backs, sing soft songs or play soft music, let children sleep on the same cot in the same place each day, and allow plenty of time for children to fall asleep. Don't

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[1] Some of the suggestions in this section are based on Tovah Klein, Calley Bittel, and Janice Molnar, "No Place to Call Home: Supporting the Needs of Homeless Children in the Early Childhood Classroom," *Young Children* (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, in press).

force children to sleep. Some children just need to rest during quiet time.

- **Encourage children to select something to take to nap with them** to hold, rub, feel, or play with quietly while they are getting ready to fall asleep. Many adults find it helpful to spend some time reading a book or watching television before they can relax enough to fall asleep. Some children have similar needs.
- **Assign one classroom team member** to be with the same group of children when they fall asleep and wake up.

Transitions[2]

Transitions are the in-between times when children are moving from one activity to the next. These can be unsettling for several reasons. Some children worry because they aren't sure what will happen next. Others are frustrated because they aren't ready to stop playing, get up from nap, or come indoors. Others are bored because they are ready for the next activity and can't handle long waiting periods. Remember that a transition is a change. Some children find it hard to cope with changes because so many things in their lives are unpredictable and inconsistent. Classroom teams need to plan for transitions just as they plan for the other parts of the day. One team member can help the children who are not ready to move to the next activity while another works with the rest of the group.

What are some supportive ways to hurdle transitions?

Some examples of supportive ways to handle transitions include:

- **Extend free play time** for a short while for a child who is not ready to move on to the next activity.
- **Extend nap times or provide additional rest periods** for children who need more sleep.
- **Provide advance notice of transitions**. Most preschool children need some advance notice; children who live in multistressed environments often need this even more.
- **Explain what will happen in the classroom, when, and with whom**. Be sure children always know "what comes next."

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[2] Some of the suggestions in this section are based on Tovah Klein, Calley Bittel, and Janice Molnar, "No Place to Call Home: Supporting the Needs of Homeless Children in the Early Childhood Classroom," *Young Children* (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, September 1993).

- **Allow plenty of time** for transitions such as clean up, going outdoors, meal and snack times, rest time, and departure.

- **Have one adult available to provide one-on-one attention to individual children** at key transition times such as arrival and departure.

- **Offer ways to save and protect projects** so children can work on them later or have a concrete way to remember them. Photographs of a special block structure will help children feel good about their hard work. Cloths or boxes can be used to cover smaller projects or they can be stored on a high shelf out of harm's way.

Handout 5-1: Handling Routines and Transitions

In a small group discuss what you can do to help children in the following situations handle routines and transitions. Your trainer will ask you to discuss one or more situations. Be prepared to discuss your responses with other participants.

Arrival

Situation	What You Can Do
Gina and Ms. Davis had a very hectic morning and it was a long ride to the center from Grandma's where they have been staying since Ms. Davis lost her job. Gina's mom is worried about saving enough money for the security deposit on a new apartment, staying out of her mother's way, and going on a job interview. Gina likes being with her Grandma, but she is worried about her mother. There wasn't time to have breakfast this morning so Gina is hungry. She asks her teacher, "What time is lunch?" She's tired too, because she had to sleep with her mother, who watched television until midnight. She sucks her thumb and twirls her hair.	

Ending one activity and starting another

Situation	What You Can Do
Troy has a hard time deciding what to do during free play. He wanders around the room—stopping in the block corner for a minute, putting on a firefighter's hat, looking at the covers of the books—for a long time until he picks an activity. When it is time to end one activity and start a new one, often he is not ready to stop what he is doing and get ready for the next part of the day, for example, lunch or outdoor play. He often refuses to put his things away at clean up time.	

Meals and snacks

Situation	What You Can Do
Antonio is always very hungry and anxious right before meals and snacks. He worries that there won't be enough to eat. It is hard for him to wait until the serving bowls come to his end of the table. Sometimes he eats so quickly that he chokes on his food. The end of the meal is also hard for Antonio, who seems to be always hungry and unsure when he will have another meal.	

Playing outdoors

Situation	What You Can Do
At home Michael does not have a safe place to play outdoors. His family feels that it is not safe for him to be outdoors, and these worries have been passed on to Michael. When his class goes outside to play he worries about being left behind when the group goes inside. He is often the last child to be ready to go outdoors.	

Rest time

Situation	What You Can Do
Kia lives in a large, noisy apartment building. She often seems frightened when she falls asleep or wakes up from a nap at the center. She is afraid of the dark and worries that she will be left alone while asleep (this happened to her several times in the past). Also, Kia needs more sleep than is allotted in the daily schedule. Occasionally, Kia sleeps a very long time and wets her pants.	

Departure

Situation	What You Can Do
Maria often loses all self-control at the end of the day. She refuses to pick up, runs the other way when she sees her mother, and some days has a tantrum. Maria seems uncertain of what the next day will bring. She has been to a lot of different preschool programs so she often asks, "Can I come back tomorrow?" Maria asks her mother, "Where are we going tonight? Are we going to eat dinner?" Often Maria's mother arrives looking very stressed. She has little patience for her daughter and does not know how to handle Maria's outbursts.	

Handout 5-2: Suggestions for Handling Routines and Transitions

Your group probably came up with some excellent suggestions for helping children in the following situations handle routines and transitions. Here are some more ideas. Are they similar to the ones you discussed?

Arrival

Situation	What You Can Do
Gina and Ms. Davis had a very hectic morning and it was a long ride to the center from Grandma's where they have been staying since Ms. Davis lost her job. Gina's mom is worried about saving enough money for the security deposit on a new apartment, staying out of her mother's way, and going on a job interview. Gina likes being with her Grandma, but she is worried about her mother. There wasn't time to have breakfast this morning so Gina is hungry. She asks, "What time is lunch?" She's tired too, because she had to sleep with her mother, who watched television until midnight. She is sucking her thumb and twirling her hair.	Greet Gina and her mother warmly. Notice that Ms. Davis is dressed up and tell her that she looks very nice. When Ms. Davis says she is going to an interview, wish her luck. After her mom leaves, reassure Gina that she will be okay and Mom will be okay. When Gina asks you when it will be time for lunch, offer her some fruit and cereal. When you see Gina sucking her thumb and twirling her hair, ask her if she would like to curl up in the quiet corner for a while. Ask the Social Services Coordinator to check with Ms. Davis about her job situation.

Ending one activity and starting another

Situation	What You Can Do
Troy has a hard time deciding what to do during free play. He wanders around the room—stopping in the block corner for a minute, putting on a firefighter's hat, looking at the covers of the books—for a long time until he picks an activity. When it is time to end one activity and start a new one, often he is not ready to stop what he is doing and get ready for the next part of the day, for example, lunch or outdoor play. He often refuses to put his things away at clean up time.	Give plenty of notice that play time is ending, "Troy, you have enough time to finish that painting, but not enough time to start another one." Stay with Troy until he finishes the painting and help him with clean up. Be flexible. If Troy is very involved in his painting and needs extra time to finish, or if he needs to do a second picture, let him. Ask the Mental Health Consultant to observe Troy at play in the classroom.

Meals and snacks

Situation	What You Can Do
Antonio is always very hungry and anxious right before meals and snacks. He worries that there won't be enough to eat. It is hard for him to wait until the serving bowls come to his end of the table. Sometimes he eats so quickly that he chokes on his food. The end of the meal is also hard for Antonio, who seems to be always hungry and unsure when he will have another meal.	Reassure Antonio that there will be enough to eat every day. Encourage him to eat slowly and take small bites of food. Have enough food for second and third helpings. Set up snacks on a table with cups, plates, napkins, juice in small pitchers, and nutritious, non-perishable finger foods such as crackers, cheese, peanut butter, or fruit. Let children know when you set out the food so they can serve themselves when hungry, and give a warning when you put the leftover food away (about one hour before lunch). Set up a small refrigerator in your room. (You might find a donation or put it on the "wish list" for your room.) Stock the refrigerator with nutritious snacks and allow children to get food when hungry. They can eat at a table nearby. Discuss Antonio's eating habits with the Health/Nutrition Coordinator.

Playing outdoors

Situation	What You Can Do
At home Michael does not have a safe place to play outdoors. His family feels that it is not safe for him to be outdoors, and their worries have been passed on to Michael. When his class goes outside to play he worries about being left behind when the group goes inside. He is often the last child to be ready to go outdoors.	Reassure Michael that adults will be outside with the children. Review the safety rules for going outdoors. Allow sufficient time for Michael to put on his coat, hat, mittens, and boots. Let him know in advance that it will soon be time for outdoor play. Ask him if he would like to bring one of his favorite toys outside—almost all indoor materials also can be used outdoors. Invite him to play with you and/or other children and encourage his involvement in active play—which will help distract him from his fears. Talk with the Social Services Coordinator about Michael's living conditions.

Rest time

Situation	What You Can Do
Kia lives in a large, noisy apartment building. She often seems frightened when she falls asleep or wakes up from a nap at the center. She is afraid of the dark and worries that she will be left alone while asleep (this happened to her several times in the past). Also, Kia needs more sleep than is allotted in the daily schedule. Occasionally, Kia sleeps a very long time and wets her pants.	Include Kia in stories and discussions about feelings and fears. Encourage her to talk about rest time and bedtime. Help her put dolls to bed for the night or a nap. Address Kia's needs at rest time; stay close by her; play soft, relaxing music; provide soft blankets and stuffed animals if she doesn't bring them from home. Reassure Kia that someone will be there while she sleeps and when she wakes up. Keep a lamp or several night lights on to help Kia overcome her fear of the dark. Make sure Kia visits the bathroom before rest time. Handle Kia's, and any other child's, toileting accidents calmly. Talk with the Social Services Coordinator about Kia's need for sleep.

Departure

Situation	What You Can Do
Maria often loses all self-control at the end of the day. She refuses to pick up, runs the other way when she sees her mother, and some days has a tantrum. Maria seems uncertain of what the next day will bring. She has been to a lot of different preschool programs so she often asks, "Can I come back tomorrow?" Maria asks her mother, "Where are we going tonight? Are we going to eat dinner?" Often Maria's mother arrives looking very stressed. She has little patience for her daughter and does not know how to handle Maria's outbursts.	Give Maria plenty of attention at the end of the day and opportunities to express her feelings about going home. Help her remember something from the day to tell her mother about. Reassure Maria that she can come to Head Start the next day. If you think she will **not** eat dinner, give her a snack right before she leaves. Share something positive about Maria's day with her mom. Say good-bye to Maria and her mom. Tell them you look forward to seeing them again tomorrow. Observe Maria in the dramatic play area to see if she is expressing some fears through her play. Check with the Social Services and Parent Involvement Components to make sure they are aware of this family's needs.

Follow-Up Activity 5-1: Adapting the Schedule

As a team, select a child [illegible] focus on during the next week. Conduct individual observations of the child several times during the week at different times of the day and in different settings. At [illegible] end of the week review your observation notes with your team and discuss how your daily schedule supports and/or hinders this child's involvement in activities. Use the format provided to make plans for adapting the schedule to better meet the child's needs. There is room to record your schedule for the first and second halves of the day. Discuss this activity with component coordinators, consultants, and other staff, as appropriate.

Child: ______________________ **Date:** ______________________

Schedule for First Half of the Day

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Child's Response to What We Do Now	Changes We Can Make
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________

Schedule for Second Half of the Day

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Child's Response to What We Do Now	Changes We Can Make
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________
____________________	____________________

Follow-Up Activity 5-2: Adapting Routines and Transitions

As a classroom team select a routine (e.g., eating, brushing teeth) or transition (getting ready to go home, coming in from outdoors, getting ready for naps) to focus on for the next week. Observe how different children react to the way you handle this routine or transition. At the end of the week review your notes with team members and discuss how the children respond to your approach. Use the format provided to plan ways to adapt the routine or transition to address the needs of all children. Discuss this activity with component coordinators, consultants, and other staff, as appropriate.

Routine or Transition: ______________________________

Dates: ______________________________

How we handle it now:

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How children respond to what we do now:

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How we can change what we do:

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Session 6
Helping Children Cope with Stress

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Help children develop acceptable coping skills.
- Use positive guidance techniques to help children learn self-discipline.
- Analyze the reasons for children's behavior.
- Develop strategies for handling children's challenging behaviors.

Materials

- Reading
  6: Helping Children Cope With Stress
- Handouts
  6-1: Helping Orlando Learn to Cope
  6-2: The Meaning Behind Children's Behavior
  6-3: Handling Challenging Behaviors
- Follow-Up Activity
  6: Using Positive Guidance Techniques

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 5 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 5 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- Children who live in multistressed environments have a great need for consistency and predictability.
- Careful planning of the schedule, routines, and transitions can reassure children and help them learn to trust.

You can ask questions and/or voice concerns before the session begins.

II. Discussion Questions and Activities

A. Helping Individual Children Cope with Stress (30 minutes)

Reading 6: Helping Children Cope With Stress provides the content for this training segment. Your trainer will record on a flip chart examples of the kinds of stress all children have to cope with and the kinds of stress that affect children who live in multistressed environments. This topic was addressed in Session 3. The discussion will focus on:

- How do the children in your classroom cope with different kinds of stress?
- How can you help children learn to cope?
- What can you do to help children learn "acceptable" coping mechanisms?

Next, classroom teams will work together to come up with examples of when they applied the principles related to children's behavior that are stated in the reading. Your examples will be shared with the full group.

Using *Handout 6-1: Helping Orlando Learn to Cope,* you will work in pairs to read and discuss the example of how a teacher helped a child learn to use appropriate coping skills. A full group discussion will address the following:

- How do teachers know when to relax the rules to help a child cope?
- What goals did the teachers have for Orlando?
- What might happen if teachers don't help children like Orlando?

As you discuss the information in the reading about how teachers model coping skills, think of examples of when you modeled the skill.

B. The Reasons for Children's Behavior (20 minutes)

In this activity, your classroom team will work together to analyze what children might be trying to communicate through their behavior. First, you will read the vignette on *Handout 6-2: The Reasons for Children's Behavior,* and answer the questions that follow. You will describe a behavior of a child in your class and analyze possible reasons for the behavior.

Next, your trainer will lead a discussion on what participants think are the reasons for Janine's behavior and what they might do to help Janine cope with the situation. Can you think of examples from your own experience of children's behavior and what children may be trying to communicate?

C. Using Positive Guidance to Promote Self-Discipline (30 minutes)

As you review the positive guidance techniques described in the reading, you can provide examples of when you used the technique or a similar one and how a child responded. Share your own ideas for positive guidance.

D. Handling Challenging Behaviors (25 minutes)

As the group discusses challenging behaviors such as biting and spitting, think of how you respond to them and why you find them challenging. Using *Handout 6-3: Handling Challenging Behaviors,* participants will work in small groups to discuss challenging behaviors and generate strategies for addressing them. Next, each small group will share their strategies with the full group.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Participants are asked to share an example of something they learned in this session that they can use to help a child learn to cope.
- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 6: Using Positive Guidance Techniques* before you meet again. It will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.
- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

Reading 6: Helping Children Cope With Stress

Helping Individual Children Cope with Stress

All preschool children have to cope with some stress as they participate in child development programs such as Head Start. For example, children must:

- get used to an unfamiliar environment;
- share the staff with other children;
- wait for a turn to participate in favorite activities; and
- deal with other children who won't let them join in their play.

Children who live in multistressed environments must cope with these "normal" situations along with the ongoing, pervasive sources of stress that make up their daily lives. For example, children may:

- not get enough sleep at night;
- live in a homeless shelter or in overcrowded housing;
- come to the program hungry;
- worry about a parent; and
- worry about violence in their home and neighborhood.

What negative behaviors do some children use to cope with stress?

Many children who live in multistressed environments come to Head Start lacking self-esteem and self-discipline. They may express their feelings through aggressive or withdrawn behaviors because they do not feel safe and do not trust adults to look after them. Some of the coping skills children develop are not productive classroom behaviors. For example:

- Some coping mechanisms make it difficult to get involved in play and participate in the day's activities. Children may:
  - remove themselves from group activities;
  - carry around blankets (often twisting or manipulating them);
  - tap their fingers;
  - jiggle their feet; or
  - suck their thumbs.
- Some coping mechanisms involve acting out or becoming aggressive, making it difficult to interact positively with adults and other children. Children may:
  - intrude in other children's play;
  - lash out at children and adults;
  - damage toys and materials; or
  - have tantrums.

How can classroom teams help children learn positive ways to cope with stress?

As you think of ways to help individual children learn to cope, it may help to focus on the following principles:

- **There are reasons for all behavior and it is helpful to know these reasons.** The Social Services Coordinator told the teacher that Lien Tran sometimes gets frightened when she hears a fire engine because last year there was a fire next door to her home. This information helps the teacher know how to respond on a neighborhood walk when a fire engine drives by and Lien Tran sobs uncontrollably.

- **Children can learn positive ways to behave even if the reasons for their misbehavior are not apparent or are not addressed easily.** Luis' teacher does not know why he has tantrums. She is working with the Mental Health Specialist to help him learn acceptable ways to cope with frustration.

- **Some children have difficulty expressing their feelings using words.** Teachers can "give" children the words they need to express themselves. "Tell him, 'I don't like it when you take my toy.'" "Ask her, 'Would you like to play with me?'"

- **Some children are eager to talk about their experiences.** Teachers can be good listeners. Many children need to talk about what's going on in their lives and they may not have anyone in their family who has the time and patience to listen.

- **Often children don't know why they feel angry or frustrated.** Soothing activities such as water play help release anger and frustration even if the child doesn't know the reasons for these feelings.

- **Children's behaviors may be expressing several different feelings.** Classroom teams can help children identify and label their feelings. "I wonder if you are feeling sad today because you miss your mommy. I think you may feel angry because she wouldn't take you with her."

- **A child's behavior may appear to be in response to a specific situation, when in fact, the child is reacting to a number of frustrating events.** Classroom teams can try to understand that the most recent situation put the child over the limits of what he or she could handle.

- **Withdrawn children may need as much attention as those who are aggressive.** Classroom teams can observe to make sure that withdrawn children—those who do not participate in the activities or play with others—are making progress. When a child begins to test the limits by acting out, this can be a sign that the child is beginning to develop a sense of trust.
- **What works for one child may or may not work for another.** In addition, a strategy that was effective one day, with one child, may not work the next time you try it. If an approach or strategy does not work, try to figure out why and then try something else.

How can adults model coping skills?

One way children learn coping skills is by watching adults model them in the classroom. Some examples include:

- **Stay calm in emergencies.** When a child gets hurt or when there is a fire drill, use a calm, reassuring tone of voice.
- **Be flexible when unexpected things occur.** If lunch is late, talk about it with the children, then read another story or sing a song. If you have some crackers on hand, pass them out so the children who are very hungry can have something to tide them over until lunch arrives. If the paint spills all over the table, hand out sponges and make clean-up the activity.
- **When appropriate, defuse tense situations with humor.** For example, if a child has built a tall block tower and another child knocks it down, you could say, "A big wind knocked down that tower." Encourage the children to work together to rebuild it. If a child who dropped the juice pitcher is about to cry, say, "Wow, that sure made a loud noise when it fell! Let's see how many sponges it takes to wipe up all that juice!" (It may be difficult to use humor skillfully. Be careful that it does not become sarcasm. If you are not comfortable with this technique try something else that better meets your teaching style.)

The Reasons for Children's Behavior

Children misbehave for many different reasons. They may be at a developmental stage where they need to test the limits of their own control. They may be forced into an unfamiliar schedule. The rules and expectations at home may differ from those at the center. There may be a family situation that is upsetting the child. Sometimes their behavior is trying because they are bored, tired, curious, or frustrated. It's important to remember that, in most cases, there is a reason for the child's behavior. Some reasons children might misbehave follow:[1]

- **They are affected by a physical condition.** Health problems and conditions such as illness, allergies, physical or learning disabilities, lack of sleep, poor nutrition, or hunger can contribute to children's misbehavior. When a child frequently or consistently has difficulty behaving appropriately, the possibility of physical causes should be considered. Classroom teams can discuss examples of the child's behavior with the parents and the component coordinators.

- **They don't know what they are supposed to do.** Adults often give children brief instructions delivered in an authoritative voice. "Pick up." "Put that away." "Use the brush properly." "Get ready." They may assume that children know how to respond to these requests. Instead, some children don't know what they are supposed to do and may not understand the words that adults use. They may need adults to show them what to do and how to do it. For example, some children need to be taught that "pick up" means collecting the toys and putting them back on the shelves. They may not understand terms such as "properly" and aren't likely to ask what the strange word means. A child may need an adult to show him how to hold a paint brush so the paint doesn't drip onto his hand.

- **They need more attention than they are getting.** Children need to feel important and valued. When they don't receive enough positive attention, they may act out to get negative attention. Their need for attention is so great that they may "misbehave" because it will get adults to notice them and spend time with them. Unfortunately, once they are successful in getting attention by misbehaving, they are likely to continue the unacceptable behavior until the cycle is broken.

- **They feel frustrated or discouraged.** When a child misbehaves often, perhaps the classroom materials and activities do not match his or her developmental level. Children feel a sense of accomplishment and success when they use materials and engage in activities that are interesting and challenging, but do not require skills that they have not yet developed. For example, a child may not yet have developed the fine motor skills needed to thread beads on a string. Teachers can encourage her to use toys with larger pieces that are easier to hold and manipulate. It is important to offer developmentally appropriate materials and activities and to change these as children gain new skills.

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[1] Adapted from Special Training for Special Needs; Module 5: Program Implementation, by Project ETC, Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association and Portage Project, 1989.

- **They are seeking more control of the situation.** Some children have very few opportunities to make decisions or have control over their lives. The Head Start program may have too many rules and too few opportunities for them to choose what they want to do. Young children like and are able to do things for themselves and are capable of making simple decisions. This helps them feel as though they have some control over their activities and helps them develop self-discipline.

- **They are feeling bored or confined.** Children need consistency to develop feelings of security, but they also need new materials and activities that respond to their growing skills and changing interests. In addition, children need opportunities every day to use their gross motor skills—both indoors and outdoors. It is important to create an environment that provides a secure, familiar framework, yet also is varied and interesting.

Using Positive Guidance to Promote Self-Discipline

All children need the help of adults to learn appropriate and acceptable behaviors. Effective discipline helps children develop self-discipline and self-esteem. Punishment, however, teaches children to behave out of fear and may reinforce their bad feelings about themselves. Understanding typical preschool behavior can prepare classroom teams for handling most of the situations that arise. Because the social skills of children who live in multistressed environments may be more characteristic of an earlier stage of development, classroom teams also will find it helpful to learn about typical toddler behavior.

In addition to knowing what the normal ranges of behavior are for young children, classroom teams should address children's individual differences—strengths, interests, needs, temperament, and ability to cope with stress. Information gained from observation notes (as discussed in Session 3) can help classroom teams get to know each child.

Effective discipline makes use of positive guidance techniques that are:

- Based on **realistic expectations** for children's behavior that reflect an understanding of child development and based on knowledge of what individual children are like.
- **Individualized** according to developmental stages, individual needs, and the situation.

What positive guidance techniques can help children learn self-discipline?

There are many positive guidance techniques that can help children learn self-discipline. Some examples follow:

- **Have a few simple, important classroom rules** so that children are not overwhelmed. Children will feel a sense of mastery because they can remember and follow these rules. If there are too many rules they are likely to forget them, and, consequently feelings of inadequacy may be reinforced. Rules might consist of the following:
    - We won't let anyone hurt another child or adult.
    - Everyone helps in his or her own way.
    - Put things away when you are finished playing.
    - Respect each other's belongings.

  As children gain an understanding of why rules are important, classroom teams can ask them to participate in rule-making. This will help them develop a sense of ownership and self-control.

- **Stay calm and objective** when observing play that may reflect the children's experiences, but is "inappropriate" for a preschool program.
    - When children imitate drug use—e.g., pretending to use crack cocaine—simply intervene by saying, "I'm the teacher here and I won't let anyone use drugs."
    - When children engage in sex play—e.g., lying on top of each other in the doll bed—involve them in another activity. "It's time to clean the house now and get ready to go to the store."

  Be sure to report the incidents to the appropriate component head (generally social services) and discuss what further response is needed in your classroom. If your observations lead you to suspect child abuse or neglect, you must follow state and local laws regarding filing a report.

- For children who have very short attention spans, cannot sit still, or become easily distracted, **keep**

group times as short as possible—no more than five minutes. Try eliminating circle time altogether for children who have difficulty coping in a large group; instead, read to small groups or have sharing time with two or three children during free play.

- **Individualize rules and expectations when appropriate.** For example: Allow Eric to paint at the easel for all of free play time even though other children are asked to take turns. (Explain the situation to the other children.) This is the one activity that Eric has shown interest in, and it seems to help him to express his feelings and release tension through painting.
- **Redirect children to acceptable activities.** For example, if a child is throwing blocks, explain that blocks may not be thrown, and show her how to throw bean bags into a laundry basket.
- **Help children understand the consequences of their actions.** For example, Charnelle grabs the funnel from Krystal at the water play table. Krystal turns and hits Charnelle. Explain to Charnelle that the reason Krystal hit her was because she took her funnel. Help her think of another way to get the funnel. (Also, be sure to tell Krystal that it is not okay to hit other children.)
- **Help children get over minor mistakes and accidents**—their own or other children's. For example, if Tevin bumps into Ronnie, help Tevin explain to Ronnie that it was an accident and not intentional. If Tevin spills his juice, stay calm and tell him where to find a sponge to wipe up the spill.
- **Provide lots of positive reinforcement** when children follow the rules or cooperate. "Geneva, I like the way you used your words to ask Malcolm for a turn on the swing."

Handling Challenging Behaviors

Some inappropriate behaviors such as biting or temper tantrums can be very disruptive and very difficult to handle. Children use challenging behaviors as a way to cope with stress. When children are out of control they need adults to step in calmly and take over. Some suggestions for handling specific challenging behaviors follow.[2]

When children hurt others **by hitting, scratching, kicking, and so on**, respond by getting down at the child's level, looking the child in the eye, and clearly stating the rule forbidding this behavior:

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[2] Based on Derry G. Koralek, Module 10, Guidance, *Department of Defense Family Child Care Providers' Training Program* (Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, 1993).

> "Alexandra, I cannot let you hurt people. I won't let you hurt others and I won't allow anyone in the group to hurt you. You can use your words to say what you want. If you feel angry you can punch the pillows or do some hammering." You may need to hold the child until he or she calms down. Your firm arms can help the child feel that someone is in control. It may take a few minutes, but the child will quiet down and you will be able to discuss what happened: "Do you want to talk about what made you feel so angry? I could see that you were having a hard time."

Reassure the child that you understand and want to listen to his or her feelings.

It is usually best to let the child recover before discussing alternative ways to handle anger and frustration. You might want to do this during a quiet, one-to-one moment later in the day:

> "This morning, when you felt badly you hit Dianté. Next time you feel badly, what could you do instead?"

This discussion can serve as a rehearsal so that the next time the child begins to lose self-control, there will be an alternative to lashing out at someone else.

> "That sounds like a good plan. You could use the punching pillow to help you feel better."

Later, when the child has finished punching the pillow, be sure to offer support.

> "I noticed that you were using the pillow to help you feel better. Do you want to talk about it?"

One of the most emotionally charged challenging behaviors is **biting**. Adults have very strong reactions to biting and may overreact. The parent of the child who has been bitten is likely to be horrified, and afraid that the child is not safe at Head Start. The parent of the child who did the biting may be embarrassed, ashamed, defensive, and unsure of how to handle the situation. Classroom teams need to understand what *may* cause a child to bite, and how to respond to stop this unacceptable behavior. It helps to remember that biting may be a child's response to frustration when he or she does not yet have the language skills needed to express feelings verbally.

If a preschool-age child bites, there is likely to be something in the child's life that is causing this behavior. When one child bites another, the adult should respond first by clearly stating that biting is not allowed and comforting the child who has been harmed. If the skin is broken, first-aid is needed to prevent infection. Sometimes it is appropriate to involve the child who did the biting in comforting the bitten child (if the child will permit this and if the child who did the biting is willing). Often in these incidents the child who has done the biting is very upset by his or her loss of self-control. Once the victim has been comforted and helped to find something else to do, the teacher can pay attention to the child who did the biting. In addition, you will need to talk with the child and his or her parents to try to find out what is causing the behavior. When a child is learning to control his or her urge to bite, it may be helpful to give the child something he or she can bite (for example, a clean washcloth) without hurting anyone.

Some children have **temper tantrums**, times when they lose control of themselves and scream, kick, cry, and otherwise express their total frustration. These are usually times when their words are not enough to express their feelings. During tantrums, a teacher may need to protect the child, and other people and things in the environment, by firmly holding his or her arms and legs until the child calms down. Once the tantrum is over, the child will feel much better if no one was hurt. Once the child is calm you can talk about what happened and what he or she could do differently in the future. It is important to let the children know that you accept their feelings and will be a good listener.

Many tantrums can be prevented by providing an appropriate program. Tired and frustrated children are more likely to have tantrums than those who are well-rested, fed nutritious meals and snacks before they get too hungry, and provided with developmentally appropriate materials and activities. When you observe children you are likely to see when they are getting tired or frustrated and can direct them to soothing activities such as water or sand play or listening to soft music.

Occasionally a child may express his or her tension by **spitting**. Most people find this to be an unsanitary and generally unpleasant behavior. As with other challenging behaviors, it may be part of a normal developmental stage or it may indicate there is a problem in the child's life. Redirecting the child to another tensional outlet such as tearing paper or pounding playdough is sometimes effective.

The Messages You Send

While you are responding to children who use inappropriate coping strategies or exhibit challenging behaviors, the other children in the group are watching and learning from your actions. It is important to avoid giving them the message that the way to get attention from adults if to misbehave. Classroom teams need to be sure they pay attention to children who are easily integrated into the group, generally follow the classroom rules, are developing self-discipline, and are able to control their own behavior. Make sure that these children know that you value their positive behaviors.

Handout 6-1: Helping Orlando Learn to Cope

Work with a colleague to read and discuss this example of how a teacher helped a child learn to use appropriate coping skills.

Orlando

When Orlando first comes to the program he runs to his cubby to get his blanket whenever he is upset. Although this goes against a classroom rule—Items from home should stay in cubbies—his teachers allow him to do so because they know that holding his blanket from home helps Orlando handle his feelings.

After a few weeks, Orlando seems to have adjusted to the program. Now when he runs to his cubby for his blanket, a teacher goes with him. While he holds the blanket she encourages him to talk to her about what was upsetting him. She helps him rejoin the group, with his blanket.

Orlando's teachers give him lots of opportunities to talk about his feelings, with blanket in hand. After a while he seems ready to talk without needing his blanket for support. His teacher encourages him to leave the blanket in his cubby. She reassures him that it will be there when he needs it. Now Orlando uses his blanket at rest time only.

How did Orlando's teacher help him learn to use appropriate coping skills?

Handout 6-2: The Meaning Behind Children's Behavior

Work with your classroom team to analyze what Janine might be trying to communicate through her behavior. Answer the questions that follow, then describe a behavior of a child in your class and analyze possible reasons for his or her behavior.

Janine

Janine is sitting at the lunch table with the other children. When the milk pitcher is passed to her she grabs it with both hands and tries to pour milk in her cup. Some milk gets in the cup, but a lot of milk spills on Janine and on the floor. Janine pushes herself away from the table and runs to her cubby to get her blanket. She carries the blanket to a corner, where she sits down, rocks back and forth, and cries loudly.

What might be the reason for Janine's behavior? (This will have to be your best "guess." You don't have enough information to know exactly what is causing the behavior.)

What might Janine's teacher do to help her feel better and deal with the situation?

Describe a situation when a child in your classroom was upset or lost control. Answer the questions that follow and analyze possible reasons for his or her behavior.

Child: ______________________ **Date:** __________________________

Setting: ____

What did the child do? ____

Has this happened before? How frequently? ____________________________

What did you do? ____

What do you think was the reason for the child's behavior? ______________

It's important to remember that, in most cases, there is a reason for a child's behavior.

Handout 6-3: Handling Challenging Behaviors

In this activity, participants work in small groups to discuss a challenging behavior and generate strategies for addressing this behavior. Be prepared to share your strategies with the full group.

Challenging Behavior: ______________________________

What makes this behavior challenging?

Describe some strategies that might be effective in dealing with this behavior:

How can you preserve children's self-esteem while dealing with this challenging behavior?

How can you help children learn acceptable coping behaviors?

Be sure to pay attention to all children and let them know that you value their positive behaviors.

Follow-Up Activity 6: Using Positive Guidance Techniques

On a large piece of paper, make a list of several positive guidance techniques you would like to try during the next week. Post the list in the classroom as a reminder. During the next week keep track of the times you use positive guidance and how the children respond. You can record your experiences on the chart below, or on one of your own design.

Dates: ______________________________

Positive Guidance Technique	Child's Response
Example: *For the first time since coming to Head Start, Mary cleared her dishes by herself. I said to her, "Mary, I like the way you cleared those dishes. You remembered all by yourself."* **Day One**	*Mary looked at me and smiled. The next day she told me, "I cleared my dishes today." I praised her again.*
Day Two	
Day Three	

Positive Guidance Technique	Child's Response
Day Four	
Day Five	

Positive guidance techniques help children develop self-discipline. They should be based on realistic expectations for children's behavior and individualized to reflect developmental stages, individual needs, and the situation.

Session 7
Supporting Parents

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Describe how parents are involved in the Head Start program.
- Implement strategies for supporting parents.
- Learn to accept children and families without passing judgment.

Materials

- Reading
  7: Supporting Parents
- Handout
  7-1: Effective Parent Education Techniques
  7-2: Accepting Families
- Follow Up Activity
  7: Maintaining Strong Partnerships

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 6 Follow-Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 6 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- The behaviors children use to cope are signs of their stress.
- Classroom teams may not be able to address the sources of children's stress but they can help them learn acceptable ways to cope.
- Using positive guidance will help children develop self-discipline, which allows children to have a sense of control over their lives.

You can ask questions and/or voice concerns before the session begins.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. The Role of Parents in Head Start (15 minutes)

As you participate in this discussion, think of how parents are supported by the Health, Social Services, and Parent Involvement Components. Think of examples of what you do to meet the Education services objectives, as stated in the *Head Start Program Performance Standards.*

B. How the Education Services Component Can Support Parents (15 minutes)

As you participate in this discussion, think about what you do to support parents. Remember, some of the suggestions in the reading can be implemented by the Education Services Component alone and some require coordination with other components.

C. Effective Parent Education Techniques (30 minutes)

Handout 7-1: Effective Parent Education Techniques includes several "stories" based on the experiences of a Head Start teacher. Read each one and discuss your reactions with your classroom team. The second part of the activity asks you to write your own "story" and prepare to share it with the full group.

After sharing your "stories" the group will identify what these techniques have in common and generate a list of "Principles of Effective Parent Education Techniques."

D. Acknowledging Your Feelings (20 minutes)

As you participate in this discussion, consider the difficulties that can arise when classroom teams become overwhelmed and have trouble accepting families.

This activity is designed to help participants identify possible negative or judgmental feelings about children and families. Your trainer will use flip chart paper to label the left side of one wall as the area representing "totally agree" and the right side as "totally disagree." You will imagine a line drawn on the floor between these two signs. The left end of the line represents total disagreement with a statement. The right end represents total agreement with a statement. The line forms a continuum of disagreement and agreement. As your trainer reads some statements, you will stand on a place on the line that represents your feelings. After you place yourself on the continuum you can share the reasons for your responses.

E. Accepting Families (25 minutes)

Ideally, the Mental Health Specialist will lead this activity, which is described on *Handout 7-2: Accepting Families.* You will be asked to think of a child and family whom you find difficult to accept and write down all of your negative feelings toward this family. For example, "He only wants to do what he wants to do." "She ran out of money before the end of the month, again, so her daughter comes to Head Start hungry." Nobody will see your paper. After you are finished you can throw it away.

Next, you will think of the same child and family and make a list of their strengths. For example, "He really enjoys the block area." or "She comes to all the parent workshops." The lists don't need to be long—two or three items are sufficient. You might want to think of your own strengths and how they can be applied to working with this child and family.

Finally, you will plan ways to use your strengths as you work with the child and family. Volunteers can share their plans. If there are no volunteers your trainer will move on to the next part of the agenda. Participants may not want to share their feelings openly.

III. Closing (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to share something they plan to do to support parents.
- Complete *Follow-Up Activity 7: Maintaining Strong Partnerships* before you meet again. It will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.
- Agree on when and where you will meet for the next session and listen to a brief overview of the topics to be addressed.

The Role of Parents in Head Start

Head Start is based on the belief that all parents want the best for their children. The program recognizes parents as the **prime educators** of their children. Classroom teams can have profound effects on children's lives, but parents have lifelong relationships with their children. They have known and cared for their children since birth and will continue to care for them long after they leave the Head Start program.

Strong partnerships between classroom teams and parents are based on respect and trust. Both parents and classroom teams make unique contributions that help children develop "social competence." When these partnerships are effective, everyone benefits. Parents learn more about their children and strengthen their parenting skills. Staff feel confident about their roles as they learn more about how to meet each child's needs. Children feel more secure knowing that both their parents and their teachers can keep them safe and help them learn.

The *Head Start Program Performance Standards* include written confirmation of how important parents are. In the first workshop we discussed what the other components do to support parents. The Education Services Component's role in supporting parents is defined in the *Performance Standards:*

> **1304.2-1 Education services objectives.**[1]
>
> (c) Involve parents in educational activities of the program to enhance their role as the principal influence on the child's growth and development.
>
> Programs encourage parents to actively participate in their children's Head Start experiences, for example, as classroom volunteers.
>
> (d) Assist parents to increase knowledge, understanding, skills, and experience in child growth and development.
>
> Head Start provides resources, one-on-one discussion, and training on topics such as "How Children Learn Through Play" or "Encouraging Your Child's Self-Help Skills."

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[1] U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Head Start Program Performance Standards, 45-CFR 1304* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, November, 1984) p. 4.

(e) Identify and reinforce experiences which occur in the home that parents can utilize as educational activities for their children.

Head Start encourages parents to reinforce and build on their child's activities by sending home parent newsletters full of ideas for home teaching and learning.

In addition, the *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs* also recognize the important role parents play. The second principle states:

2. The cultural groups represented in the communities and families of each Head Start program are the primary sources for culturally relevant programming.

How the Education Services Component Can Support Parents

For parents who are coping with multiple sources of stress, just having their children enrolled in Head Start may provide much needed support. The respite Head Start provides gives parents a temporary break from child care responsibilities and perhaps gives parents opportunities to tackle and eliminate some of the sources of stress in their lives. For example, knowing that their child is well cared for at Head Start may allow a parent to work, attend a literacy class, enroll in a job training program, look for housing, care for a sick relative, or participate in a substance abuse treatment program. If families need full-day child care so they can work towards achieving their goals, the Education Services Component staff can work with other component staff to help the family find the necessary support.

At times, parents may have ambivalent feelings about Head Start. They may have control over very little in their lives and may fear that Head Start is trying to gain control of their children. Staff need to be sensitive to this concern and let parents know that their involvement in their children's lives and in the program are valued. In addition, parents may not be aware that Head Start is a program for the whole family. They may have heard only of the services that are provided for children. During the enrollment process staff need to tell parents about what Head Start offers children, what the program offers parents, and what parents can offer the program.

Some parents may feel pressured to be a volunteer. They may feel too overwhelmed by what is going on in their lives to devote time to the program. When parents are willing to become classroom volunteers, it is helpful to ask them to choose how they would like to be involved. At first, parents may need to spend time getting used to the classroom. They may relieve their own stress by getting involved in activities—making collages or using playdough. They may want to observe their child and others in the classroom or outdoors. When parents seem ready to do more, ask them what they would like to do or suggest a variety of tasks from which they can choose—from making name tags for a field trip to reading to one or two children. (Do not ask parents to read unless you are positive that they know how. It is a mistake to assume that all parents can read. Those who cannot may feel embarrassed to tell you and may not return to volunteer.) Remember, it is never appropriate to make parents feel that they have to volunteer. Some parents feel too overwhelmed by what is going on in their lives to volunteer in the program.

Why are home visits important?

Home visits give parents a sense of the program's concern for them and their children. Head Start staff may be the only people who visit the parents in their home; most parents perceive them as helpful and nonthreatening. In addition, home visits allow classroom teams to learn things about a child and family that might take much longer to learn in other ways. For example, during a home visit a teacher might observe that a child seems to have a positive relationship with his grandmother. The teacher could let the parent know that she and her mother are both welcome to participate in Head Start—in the classroom or in other parent involvement activities.

Sometimes staff are reluctant to make home visits because they believe that the surrounding community is unsafe, particularly for strangers. In these instances, alternative home visiting practices are needed. Head Start programs could arrange for a community leader to escort staff conducting home visits, encourage parents to meet visiting staff in the lobby of a high-rise building, or set up space at the program where teachers and parents could meet to talk and share information and ideas. The latter suggestion does not permit staff to view the home environment first-hand; however, teachers and parents can use the time to discuss the child's progress and make plans for continuing to support his or her development, at home and at the program.

What is the greatest support staff can give parents?

The greatest support staff can give parents is to accept them, without passing judgment on their life styles or situations. Families coping with multiple sources of stress may need many things (e.g., housing, jobs, training, health care, counseling, substance abuse treatment). But what they need most is to feel that they can function as independent, competent adults. Staff can show warmth, friendliness, and concern, and listen to parents' thoughts and feelings.

Showing respect for their viewpoints, even when you do not agree, can help parents feel competent in their parenting skills.

How can Head Start staff support parents?

In addition to providing a respite, there are many things classroom teams and other Head Start staff can do to support parents. The following examples can be adapted to accommodate your program's needs.

- Give parents **frequent updates** on their children's favorite activities and examples of how they are growing and developing. Updates can occur during drop-off and pick-up times or in short notes home or tape recordings about a child's activities.
- Arrange for **transportation** to parent meetings. In some areas there is no public transportation or it is unsafe to use in the evenings when meetings often occur. If this is not possible, encourage parents to arrange car pools.
- Provide **enough food** at snack and meal times to feed parent volunteers. Parents may come to the program hungry. Homeless families usually eat at the shelter and aren't allowed to take food out of the dining room. Invite parents to participate at Head Start in family-style meals with their children.
- Provide **a comfortable, pleasant place** where parents can relax, drink a cup of coffee or juice, eat a healthy snack, and talk with each other. Furnish it with adult-sized tables and chairs and stock the area with books and articles on parenting; a typewriter, paper, envelopes, and other writing materials; information on community resources; bus schedules; grocery coupons; newspapers; and whatever else would be of interest to parents.
- Provide **access to a telephone** (local calls only). Families may not have telephones, so use of a telephone at the center will help them take care of tasks such as making a medical appointment, reporting a broken appliance to a landlord, and finding a new apartment.
- Include money in the budget for **cameras, film, and photo processing** so you can take pictures of the children engaged in indoor and outdoor activities and pictures of parents and children together. Give copies of the photographs to parents.

- **Model developmentally appropriate ways to talk and play with children**. Explain to parents what you are doing and why. For example, a parent might hear a teacher say to a child, "Please walk inside." The teacher could explain that this helped the child learn what **to do**, rather than what not to do—"Don't run."

- **Help parents have successful interactions with their children**. Step in and help when a parent seems to be getting upset. "Let me hold the baby for a minute while you help Rhonda put on her shoes."

- **Provide written information in the parents' primary language**. Try to find volunteer translators within the Head Start program or from other community groups.

- **Focus on the future** and how the program can work with parents to counteract the effects of a child's developmental lags. Parents often feel that they don't know how to help their children and worry that their child will have problems in school. They usually are relieved to hear of the many ways that they can contribute to their child's development.

- **Provide information on child development and parenting** through spontaneous conversations and scheduled workshops. Be sure that workshops use an interactive, hands-on format and provide opportunities for parents to talk to and learn from each other. Parent education can help parents understand the reasons for their children's behavior and learn ways to encourage their children's self-discipline.

Acknowledging Your Feelings

Head Start classroom teams are hard-working, dedicated, and caring individuals who have the skills, interest, and knowledge to promote children's growth and development. At times, however, staff may be frustrated and overwhelmed when they feel that there is nothing they can do to help a child cope with stress. They may feel angry with the family, pass judgment on a parent's actions, blame the parents for the conditions that are resulting in their child's high level of stress, or disapprove of the family's values or life style. As callous as they may sound, these kinds of thoughts can result when classroom teams feel that their efforts are not making a difference in the lives of children and families.

It is important to acknowledge negative feelings when they do occur and to get the support you need to "get back on track." If you find yourself "blaming" families for conditions that are beyond their control or passing judgments regarding the decisions or choices that families make, you may need some help to reduce your own stress and to identify the many positive contributions you make to Head Start children and families. When classroom team members do not deal with their negative feelings, children and families do not receive the support they need and the team members may become "burned out."

Sometimes staff feel so eager to assist a family that they think that through their efforts alone a family can be "rescued" from a multistressed environment. Staff may try to do too much for families, without allowing families to use their own strengths to develop coping skills. This approach is not only inappropriate, it is generally totally ineffective. Both the staff and the families end up disappointed.

Handout 7-1: Effective Parent Education Techniques

The following are based on true stories from the experiences of Head Start teacher Anna Clarke-Brown. Read each one and discuss your reactions with your classroom team.

Sarah and Her Mother

Sarah, a child in my class, seemed to constantly hit and pinch the other children without provocation. When Sarah's mother volunteered in the classroom I noticed her hit Sarah. I explained to her that we do not allow spanking in Head Start and that there were other alternatives for discipline. I suggested several positive discipline techniques. When we planned a puppet show about how we use our words, we invited parents to attend. I extended a personal invitation to Sarah's mother. Sarah's mother seemed to enjoy volunteering, and she and Sarah both had some really great times together in the classroom. The hitting behavior soon diminished.

Polly and Her Parents

Polly used a lot of swear words towards adults and children. I told her that I like her, and that I did not like the words that she was using. One day I heard her parents in the hallway having an argument. They used a lot of profanities. Next day in circle time I told a story about a little girl whose parents were fighting a lot. The little girl thought it was her fault, but it was not. I explained that it was okay to talk about feelings. We identified different kinds of feelings and talked about appropriate ways to express them. Polly soon stopped using profane language. Her parents came to class and said Polly had told them that instead of swearing they needed to say, "I'm mad at you!"

Carlos and His Mother

Carlos was learning to assert himself verbally with his friends. One day his mother came to me and said, "Carlos keeps telling me to use my 'inside' voice when I yell at him. Did he learn that here? And when I spanked him, he said, 'Stop it, Mommy. I don't like that. You need to use your words!'" This was a great opportunity to talk with Carlos' mother about how to teach children to use words instead of hitting. I also gave her a pamphlet on positive guidance techniques that help children develop self-discipline.

Next, think of a story based on your team's experiences working with children and parents. Be prepared to share your classroom team's story with the full group.

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[2] Based with permission on Children's Services Department, Santa Clara County Office of Education, *A Guide to Provide Comprehensive and Quality Services to Homeless Children and Their Families* (San Jose, CA: Santa Clara County Office of Education, nd) p. 18-19.

Handout 7-2: Accepting Families

Think of a child and family whom you find it difficult to accept and write down all of your negative feelings toward them. For example, "He only wants to do what he wants to do." "She ran out of money before the end of the month, again, so her daughter comes to Head Start hungry." Nobody will see your paper. After you are finished you can throw it away.

1. What negative feelings do you have towards this child or family?

____

____

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____

____

Nobody will see this paper. You can throw it away at any time.

Think of the same child and family and make a list of their strengths. For example, "He really enjoys the block area." or "She comes to all the parent workshops." The lists don't need to be long—two or three items are sufficient.

2. What are the strengths of this child and family?

Think of your own strengths and how they could be applied to working with this child and family.

3. What are some of your own strengths?

4. How do you plan to use your own strengths as you work with this child and family?

This activity is a first step in learning to accept rather than judge children and families.

Follow-Up Activity 7: Maintaining Strong Partnerships

Below you will find several suggested strategies for maintaining strong partnerships with parents. During the next week try some of these suggestions as you work with children and their families. Record your experiences—what you did and the parents' response. At the end of the week meet as a classroom team to discuss the effectiveness of these strategies and what else you can do to support parents.

Dates: ______________________________

1. **Respond to parents' concerns or questions even though they may seem trivial.**

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2. **Try parents' suggestions, unless you think they will hurt the child, even when they differ from what you would do.**

____

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3. **Help children and families feel good about belonging to the same family.**

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4. **Tell parents about the good things that happen at Head Start each day.**

____

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____

5. Acknowledge events and transitions in families' lives.

6. Be sensitive to parents' feelings about leaving their child at Head Start.

7. Maintain confidentiality when parents share something private with you.

8. Add your own suggestion here:

9. Add your own suggestion here:

Strong partnerships between parents and classroom teams benefit children and support parents as prime educators of their children.

Session 8
An Approach to Problem Solving

Summary for Classroom Teams

Objectives

This session will enable you to:

- Use problem solving techniques to develop strategies for helping individual children.
- Establish ongoing support groups.

Materials

- Reading
  8: An Approach to Problem Solving
- Handouts
  8-1: Problem Solving Format
  8-2: Support Groups

Agenda

I. Discussion of Session 7 Follow Up Activities (10 minutes)

As you discuss the Session 7 Follow-Up Activities, remember the following:

- Maintaining strong partnerships between parents and staff benefits everyone, especially the children.
- The Education Services Component can support parents so that they will feel like competent, independent adults.

You will have an opportunity to ask questions and/or raise concerns before beginning the discussion.

II. Discussion Topics and Activities

A. Identifying and Addressing Children's Needs (1 hour)

During this discussion, refer to *Reading 8: An Approach to Problem Solving,* which shows how a classroom team used a series of problem solving steps to examine the reasons for a child's behavior and to develop strategies for helping the child. *Handout 8-1: Problem Solving Format* is a blank form you can use in the future.

B. Establishing an Ongoing Support Group (50 minutes)

Your trainer will lead a discussion on whether to continue meeting as an ongoing support group, facilitated by the Education Coordinator and/or the Mental Health Specialist (or other component coordinator as appropriate in your program). You will review *Handout 8-2: Support Groups* and consider the following questions:

- Were the problem solving strategies presented in this session useful?
- Would you like to continue meeting as a support group to brainstorm other problems or discuss individual children's behaviors and needs?
- What format would you suggest for future meetings? Meetings could focus on a specific topic, individual children, or be open-ended.

If you decide to continue meeting you will need to agree on when, for how long, how frequently, and where. At your first meeting you can review the ground rules and logistics.

If you decide to conclude your meetings with this session, congratulations for gaining new knowledge and skills for working with highly stressed children. The readings, handouts, and follow-up activities from these sessions can serve as an ongoing resource for your classroom team.

Reading 8: An Approach to Problem Solving

To plan a program that addresses children's needs, adults need more than good instincts and intentions. They need time and encouragement to develop thoughtful strategies, try them, and evaluate to determine what works for a child and what does not. Problem solving skills can help classroom teams identify and address children's needs.

Observations of individual children and of the entire group are an important part of problem solving. When trying to develop effective strategies to solve a problem or address an individual child's needs, classroom teams may find it helpful to have another adult (a team member, a parent, the Education Coordinator, or another Coordinator) conduct an observation. The two sets of observation notes can be compared and the adults can work together to develop strategies.

The following example shows how a classroom team used a series of problem solving steps to examine the reasons for a child's behavior and to develop strategies for helping the child.

Andrew

> Three-year-old Andrew often falls asleep at storytime, which is before lunch and nap time. When I wake him for lunch he is cranky and doesn't eat much. It takes him a long time to settle down for nap. It is almost impossible to awaken him when nap is over. When he does wake up, he is irritable and hungry. He asks me for something to eat.

Identify the Problem

Observe the child for several days, compare your notes, and answer the following questions.

1. What does the child do that concerns you?

He falls asleep before lunch and nap time. He misses free play and outdoor time and he doesn't eat much lunch. When he does wake up he's hungry, but lunch is over.

2. **Why do you find the behavior challenging? For example, does the behavior disrupt the group or make it difficult for the child to participate in activities?**

   We don't know whether to let him sleep. If he sleeps, he misses important parts of the program. If he doesn't sleep, he's too cranky to participate.

   We're not sure what to say to the other children.

   There's nowhere for him to sleep during free play time.

3. **When and how often does the behavior occur? Is it every day? during transitions? during free play? Does it happen when he is tired, hungry, or frustrated?**

   This behavior occurs in the morning, about 3 times a week.

4. **How long has the child been behaving this way? Is this something new or has the child always behaved this way?**

   Andrew started coming to school tired two weeks ago. Before that he stayed awake through lunch time and then had a two-hour nap.

5. **What do you think the child is trying to communicate? For example, is the child angry, frustrated, confused, overstimulated, scared, lonely, sad?**

   It's clear that Andrew is tired and cannot concentrate on anything else.

Obtain Information From the Child's Family

Try to meet with the child's family to discuss the child's behavior at the program and at home. In addition, talk with the Social Services and Parent Involvement Coordinators to learn more about what might be taking place in the child's life. Look for answers to the following questions:

1. **Is anything happening at home that might be causing the behavior? Have there been any changes in the home environment?**

   One of us talked to Andrew's mother. She said that Andrew's two older cousins moved in with his family three weeks ago. Andrew sleeps in the same room with them. They go to bed at 11:00 p.m.

   An 18 year old aunt takes care of Andrew at night while his Mom works. She lets him stay up with his cousins until 11:00 p.m.

Andrew often wakes up with nightmares. Once he wakes up he has a hard time getting back to sleep.

2. What can the family do at home to address the problem? (Focus on realistic changes.)

Andrew's mom will ask the aunt to make sure Andrew gets to sleep earlier. Andrew will sleep in his mom's bed until she gets home. When she gets home she will move him to his own bed.

His mom will try to figure out what's causing the nightmares. We will continue observing him to see if there are any clues about why he's having nightmares.

Identify the Way You Respond to the Behavior

Think about what you and your colleagues do in response to the child's behavior. Are your strategies helping the child?

1. How do you feel when the child behaves this way?

Andrew's behavior makes us uneasy because we don't know which he needs more—to sleep or to participate in activities. Some of us feel confused and irritated.

2. What do you usually say or do? How does the child respond?

We usually say, "You need to wake up" or, "It isn't nap time, don't you want to play?"

He gets worse when we wake him up. He cries and fusses and we can't get him involved in anything. One team member spends so much time with him that she has no time to spend with other children.

3. Do the strategies you use now work?

No, they just make Andrew and us feel worse.

Evaluate Your Program

Consider whether each of the following program elements is developmentally appropriate.

1. Do you need to adapt the environment?

This doesn't seem to be part of the problem.

2. Do you need to adapt the daily schedule?

Yes, we could be flexible so Andrew could have an uninterrupted nap period when he needs it. The reality is that Andrew isn't getting enough sleep at home. Until his family is able to work through the problem, he needs to sleep for part of his time at Head Start.

3. Do you need to change the way you handle routines and transitions?

We can adapt the routines so Andrew can have lunch after his nap. Rest is so important for Andrew that it's best for him to be awake and alert for part of the day, instead of irritable and uncooperative for most of the day.

4. Do you need to change the way you interact with this child?

This doesn't seem to be part of the problem.

5. Are your expectations for this child's behavior and abilities appropriate?

This doesn't seem to be part of the problem.

Develop Strategies

Review the information you collected about this child and his or her family. Develop several strategies to help the child.

We will let Andrew sleep when he first arrives in the morning.

We will put down a mat in a corner of the classroom and tell him that when he is tired, that's where he can rest.

We will accept that it is better to have him awake and participating for part of the day, rather than tired and irritable for the entire day.

Implement Strategies

Try out your strategies for a week or more. Allow enough time for change to take place. Ask another classroom team member to observe the child, then discuss what you each have seen. Bring questions to staff meetings.

Andrew took morning naps on his mat for about a week. By then the changes his mother made at home took effect and he started coming to the program awake and ready to play.

Evaluate and Refine Strategies

If your strategies are effective, continue to use them. If not, look for other ways to achieve the same goal. For some children, even if the program is developmentally appropriate and you have made adaptations, it will not "solve" their problem. Change can be slow for many children—it is important to set realistic, short-term goals.

Handout 8-1: Problem Solving Format

Identify the Problem

Observe the child for several days, compare your notes, and answer the following questions.

1. **What does the child do that concerns you?**

____

____

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2. **Why do you find the behavior challenging? For example, does the behavior disrupt the group or make it difficult for the child to participate in activities?**

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3. **When and how often does the behavior occur? Is it every day? during transitions? during free play? Does it happen when he is tired, hungry, or frustrated?**

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____

4. **How long has the child been behaving this way? Is this something new or has the child always behaved this way?**

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5. **What do you think the child is trying to communicate? For example, is the child angry, frustrated, confused, overstimulated, scared, lonely, sad?**

____

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____

Obtain Information from the Child's Family

Try to meet with the family to discuss the child's behavior at the program and at home. Also, talk with the Social Services and Parent Involvement Coordinators to learn more about what might be taking place in the child's life. Look for answers to the following questions:

1. **Is anything happening at home that might be causing the behavior? Have there been any changes in the home environment?**

2. **What can the family do at home to address the problem? (Focus on realistic changes.)**

Identify the Way You Respond to the Behavior

Think about what you and your colleagues do in response to the child's behavior. Are your strategies helping the child?

1. **How do you feel when the child behaves this way?**

2. **What do you usually say or do? How does the child respond?**

3. **Do the strategies you use now work?**

Evaluate Your Program

Consider whether each of the following program elements is developmentally appropriate.

1. **Do you need to adapt the environment?**

2. **Do you need to adapt the daily schedule?**

3. **Do you need to change the way you handle routines and transitions?**

4. **Do you need to change the way you interact with this child?**

5. **Are your expectations for this child's behavior and abilities appropriate?**

Develop Strategies

List several strategies for helping this child.

Implement Strategies

Try out your strategies for a week or more. Allow enough time for change to take place. Ask another team member to observe the child, then discuss what you each have seen. Bring questions to staff meetings.

Evaluate and Refine Strategies

If your strategies are effective, continue to use them. If not, look for other ways to achieve the same goal. For some children, even if the program is developmentally appropriate and you have made adaptations, it will not "solve" their problem. Change can be slow for many children—it is important to set realistic, short-term goals.

Handout 8-2: Support Groups

The purpose of a support group is to bring together people who are experiencing a similar stress. The group provides a chance to exchange and process information. It can help classroom teams:

- feel less isolated and part of a team;
- reduce stress by talking about how to address the needs of children and their families;
- enhance observation and problem solving skills;
- identify resources within Head Start and the community; and
- get new ideas from other people.

The group members select the topics to be discussed and decide when and how to conduct sessions. Several types of meetings are possible:

- **Specific topic**—for example, the group focuses on children who are easily distracted, or ways to adapt the classroom environment to meet the needs of all children.

- **Diagnostic**—the group focuses on an individual child and develops strategies to address the child's needs. The Mental Health Specialist and other consultants (speech therapist, for example) may wish to attend this type of meeting.

- **Open-ended**—the group talks about what has happened to them and to the children since the last meeting; there is no set agenda or topics of discussion.

You may want to begin with meetings that have a specific topic. As members learn more about how the group works, you can move into open-ended discussions.

General guidelines includes:

- Participants sit in a circle.
- Meetings are held weekly, if possible, at the same time of day.
- Everyone who wants to has a chance to participate.
- There are no right or wrong answers or suggestions.
- Participants try to stay focused on the question or topic.

The facilitator's role includes:

- Reminding participants of guidelines.
- Providing direction when needed.
- Offering suggestions if appropriate.
- Evaluating the process and suggest changes if needed.

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